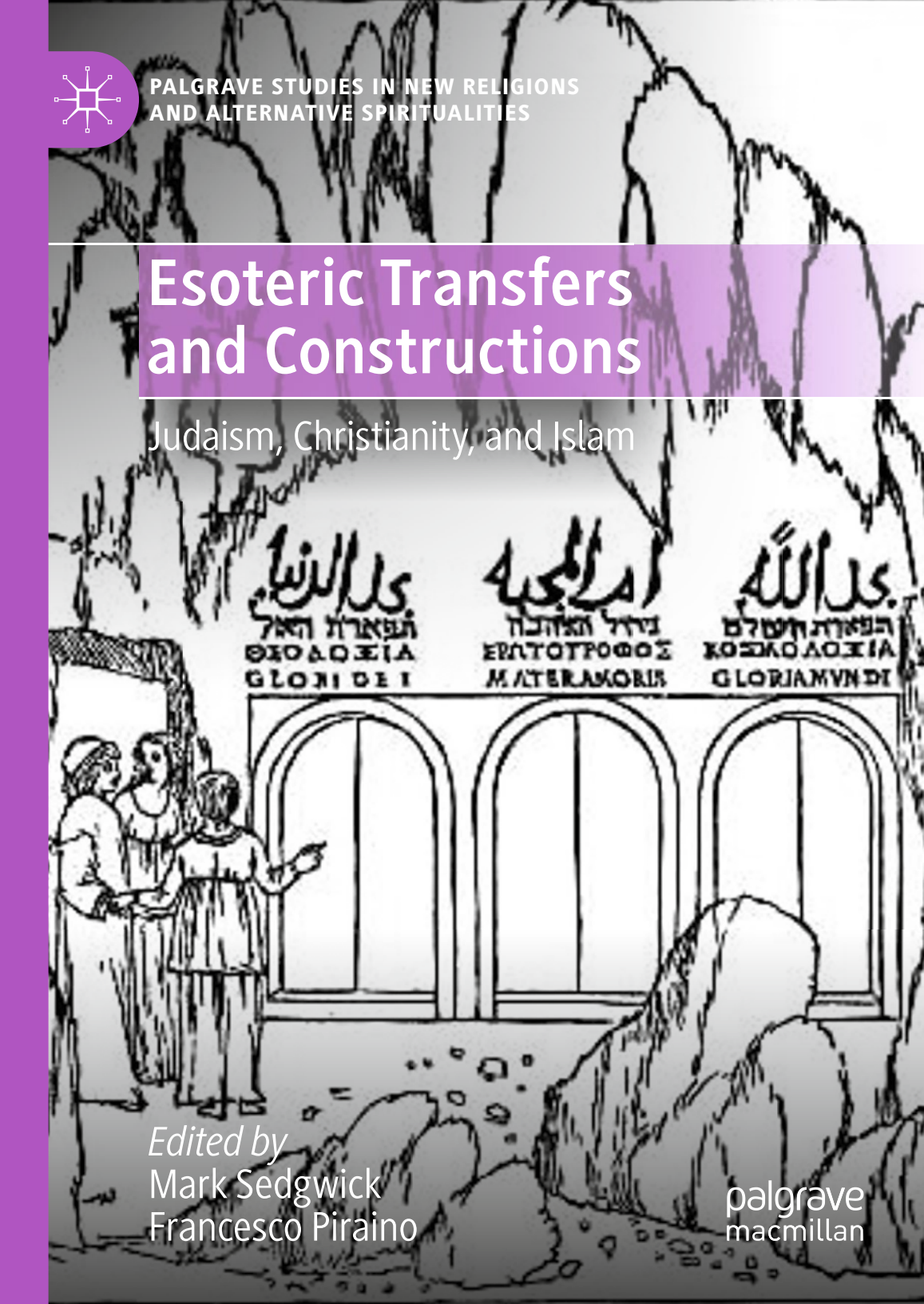

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Esoteric Transfers and Constructions

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

Edited by
Mark Sedgwick
Francesco Piraino

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Esoteric and the Mystical, Transfers and Constructions

Mark Sedgwick and Francesco Piraino

A recurring theme in some esoteric and mystic movements is their relationship to religious alterity. While in many religious phenomena, identity boundaries—the frontiers between "us" and "them"—are of crucial importance, in esotericism and mysticism the boundaries may be blurred or crossed. This is sometimes due to the focus on individual experience and on instruments of expression such as poetry, metaphysics, and music. Blurriness should not be confused with secular openness, tolerance, or relativism, however. In fact, sometimes it can have purely aesthetic reasons, or be an instance of cultural appropriation.

The relationship between esoteric and mystical currents in different religious traditions has long interested scholars, and this interest has given

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rise to such classic works as Rudolph Otto's *West-östliche Mystik* (Mysticism East and West, 1926) and Toshihiko Izutsu's *Sufism and Taoism* (1984).[1] The comparative approach became mainstream between the 1950s and 1980s among the intellectuals of the Circle of Eranos, such as Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), Mircea Eliade (1907–1986), and Henry Corbin (1903–1978).[2] Yet this and other comparative approaches implied a "heroic"[3] quest for religious essences, archetypes, and universals, and sometimes a harsh critique against the social sciences and institutional religions, the former accused of reductionism, the latter accused of being of only secondary importance compared to mysticism and esotericism, echoing the concept of "second hand" religion employed by William James.[4]

Scholars have since grown suspicious of such treatments, tending to regard universal categories primarily as constructions, and seeing in such comparative studies the imposition of essentialist (and mostly Western) categories. Just as structuralists once endorsed such approaches, deconstructionists now question them.

The construction of universal categories and the identification of essences have long been among the main objectives of human thought. In the history of esotericism (as we will see in this book) there have been several conceptualizations of a universal human being (see Chap. 13), a universal language, and a universal religion or philosophy (see Chaps. 7 and 12), aiming at harmonizing or dominating the complexity and multiplicity of our lives (see Chap. 6).

Archetypes, universal categories, and structuralism are not the only explanations of similarities between different esoteric and mystical currents, however. There are also transfers between currents, as diffusionists propose, just as there are transfers within currents. This book therefore looks both at transfers between and constructions within esoteric and mystical currents in three different religious traditions: Jewish, Christian or Western, and Islamic. It thus covers its topic from two different but complementary perspectives, diffusionist and deconstructionist. It is based firmly on empirical case studies, aiming in this way to make a soundly based contribution to an important theoretical debate.

The Dreams of Poliphilo

One example of esoteric transfers and constructions is the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, a title that could be translated as "amorous struggle in a dream of Poliphilo." This beautiful book, most probably written by Francesco Colonna (1433/34–1527), a Venetian Dominican monk, at the end of

the fifteenth century, was printed by Aldo Manuzio (1449–1515) in 1499 with 172 woodcut illustrations.

The book's hero Poliphilo (he who loves multiplicity) pursues his love Polia (multiplicity) in a dream, encountering dragons, wolves, and maidens. In his dreams, he falls asleep, continuing his travels in a dream within a dream, during which he encounters Venus and Cupid, who allow him finally to be rejoined with the beloved Polia.

In Colonna's initiatic journey, in which the beloved Polia embodies the inner transformation and purification of the soul, we can find Platonic and Neoplatonic themes that were central in the Italian Renaissance, influencing not only literature and philosophical debates, but also Christianity, as they also influenced Judaism and Islam in other contexts. These Platonic and Neoplatonic themes have not only been transferred into multiple religious traditions, but became a language in their own right for imaging a universal religion or philosophy.

In reading the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* we can trace esoteric transfers, and also the imagination and construction of religious alterity. One example of this is the illustration of three doors labeled in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Arabic, reprinted on the front cover of this book. On one side there is "Gloria mundi" (worldly glory), on the other side "Gloria dei" (divine glory), but Colonna's hero Poliphilo chose the middle door: "Mater amoris" (mother of love)—that is, the path of love. The use of Arabic in this book was not for its meaning but for an aesthetic purpose, and was probably meant to underline the universality of the esoteric quest. The Arabic-Islamic alterity in Colonna's book, then, is imagined more than experienced.

The *Hypnerotomachia* also gives us another perspective on religious alterity through narratives about the body, emotions, and love that could be considered as structural or universal themes. Poliphilo, in his dreamlike journey, describes taste, smell, and touch. Despite his quest for Love with a capital L, the body is of particular importance, as the human desires and even lusts for "furor erotico."

It is often impossible to tell the difference between imagining or constructing the Other and being influenced by it. Hence, transfer and construction can usefully be understood as lying on a continuum, where ideas and practices are lived and understood, but also manipulated, appropriated, and reinvented. We will see in Chap. 8 of this book how the religious Other could become the imagined ideal place, where values and practices denied in one's own culture could be lived. In other cases, the Other is

"robbed" of its ideas and practices, as we will see in Chap. 5. Sometimes the relation with the Other is completely absent: rather than a dialog it is a monolog with a simulacrum of alterity; in fact, thanks to the narrative of esoteric secrecy the author could suggest that the Other is saying exactly what the author wants, bending the meaning completely (see Chap. 7).

Abraham and the Mediterranean

This book's choice of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam partly reflects the theoretical assumption of "Abrahamic harmony"[5] that is itself a construction and is thus also problematic, and partly reflects the dominant religions found in one particular region, the Mediterranean, with some extensions to the west and the south. The identification of the Western with the Christian should also be questioned, as one of the things that this book shows is that the West—wherever and whatever that may be—is not only Christian. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all also draw on Greek antiquity, for example.

There have also been important transfers between the three religious traditions this book considers and traditions beyond the Mediterranean, notably the Zoroastrian tradition of Persia and the multiple traditions of India. To attempt to include all these transfers in one book, however, would be excessively ambitious, and so this book restricts itself to the three main religious traditions found around the Mediterranean. Geography has provided multiple opportunities for transfers between Jewish, Christian or Western, and Islamic traditions. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam also extend beyond the Mediterranean, of course, and this book will take us south to Yemen during the premodern period, and west to the Americas during the modern period.

As we will see, during the premodern period the tradition that runs parallel to Judaism and Islam is the Western Christian tradition, written in Latin, and in the modern period there is a Western tradition that is not overtly Christian, usually articulated in French, German, or English. Religious tradition cannot always be neatly paired with language, of course: Arabic was once a great imperial language, not just the language of Muslims, and was used by Jews and Christians as well. French and English occupy a comparable position today.

The Esoteric and the Mystical

That this book looks at both esoteric and mystical currents in some ways solves the problem of distinguishing between them, but even so it is worthwhile to spend a little space on the question of how it understands these two important but difficult terms. The debate about what the "esoteric" is that started with Antoine Faivre's oft-cited definition of 1986[6] and was initially a debate about "Western" esotericism, a concept that originally arose as an alternative to the "Eastern" esotericism of the Theosophical Society.[7] The Theosophical Society was not a scholarly organization, and it is important to remember that scholarly constructions often have non-scholarly roots. Theosophical constructions of esotericism have been widely influential, as have later constructions by Traditionalists such as René Guénon (1886–1951) and Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998). Scholars such as Eliade and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (born 1933) followed where the Traditionalists led.

The "Western," geographical, or civilizational restriction has subsequently been questioned in a second debate,[8] to which we will return below, but it is important to note that the original understanding of Western esotericism, however problematic, allowed an entire new research field to come into being, fostered in North America by the Association for the Study of Esotericism (ASE), in Europe by the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE), and then by similar bodies in Russia and South America.[9] The question of what Western esotericism is, then, can be answered in two ways: in theoretical terms with the aid of the major contributors to the scholarly debate,[10] which could be resumed in three main frames (the approach focusing on the forms of thought; the genealogical focusing on the historical processes; and the discursive formation focusing on narratives) and in practical terms by looking at what topics have been discussed at the meetings of ASE and ESSWE.

The debate on the nature of mysticism is less current than the debate on the nature of esotericism, though there are signs of it re-starting.[11] At one level, mysticism can be understood as the same thing as esotericism, since *esōterikós* at one point meant that which was restricted to an inner circle, and that which was restricted to an inner circle was the *mustērion* (Latin: *mysterium*). At another level, however, the phrase "theologia mystica" came to have a very specific technical meaning in medieval and early modern Europe, due to the fact that the particular theology that Pseudo-Dionysius had labeled as restricted or hidden was Neoplatonic and pointed

to the "unio mystica," *henōsis*, the union with God that is (perhaps) known in Hebrew as *devekut* (attachment) and in Arabic as *ittiṣāl* (contact), *ittihād* (union), or *fanāʾ* (dissolution). The "perhaps" is important, because the extent to which these terms mean the same thing, or indeed quite what they mean anyhow, is much disputed.[12] Part of the problem may be that, as Gilya G. Schmidt has argued in the case of *devekut*, they have actually meant different things in different places at different times.[13] It is likely, however, that Colonna's middle door, "Mater amoris," has something to do with mysticism; but what is mysticism? Is it an experience—the experiential and bodily knowledge of God—or a specific theological current?

During the twentieth century, the understanding of mysticism developed into a universal category of human experience,[14] which implies all the same problematic issues as all kinds of universalism, such as normativity, ethnocentrism, translatability, reductionism, and essentialism. This development is reviewed in detail in Chap. 11, and so will not be explored further here.

If the term "mystical" is understood not in its widest sense as human religious experience and/or emotion but in a more narrow Neoplatonic sense, the "esoteric" can be understood more widely as denoting that which is hidden, either because it belongs to the world of the unseen (*nistar* in Hebrew, *ghayb* in Arabic) or because it is somehow concealed (*sod* in Hebrew, *bāṭin* in Arabic). In this sense, "esoteric" has something in common with "occult," a term which many scholars have abandoned because of its negative associations, though other scholars favor its use to describe a particular period in the history of esotericism.[15] Occultism, in turn, brings us to another topic much discussed at meetings of ASE and ESSWE: magic. This is, once again, a contested term, if only because Deuteronomy 18:11–12 condemns a long list of magical practices including generic *kishuf* (sorcery), a prohibition generally endorsed by the medieval Catholic Church, and repeated in Islam in the many *ḥadīth* (canonical reports of the Prophet's sayings) that condemn *siḥr* (magic). Practitioners of magic, then, often had a strong incentive to maintain that what they were doing was not, actually, magic. A further complication is that much of what modern Westerners might classify as magic—for example, anything to do with demons (Hebrew: *shedim*; Arabic: *jinn*)—is not, in Jewish or Islamic terms, necessarily magical. One of the chapters of the Quran that is most often used in daily prayer, for example, refers to the *jinn* (Quran 114: 6), and the *jinn* are quite as mainstream in Islam as angels are

in Christianity. Even though the *jinn* are not necessarily magical or esoteric, then, magic does refer to the unseen and the hidden, and so may be classed as esoteric, certainly in terms of forms of thought.

Transfers, of course, also involve translation, transformation, and construction. Although the illustrator of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* obtained an accurate translation into Arabic of the Latin labels on the three doors, he forgot that Arabic and Latin are written in opposite directions. While the central door has the appropriate Arabic translation, the door on the right has the translation of the Latin label for the door on the left, so that the worldly becomes divine, and the door on the left has the Arabic translation of the Latin label for the door on the right, so that the divine becomes worldly. Fortunately for Poliphilo, the middle door is correctly labeled in all languages.

This is an unusually dramatic (and accidental) transformation, but transformation is not always accidental. Sometimes it is a form of acculturation, as in the case of premodern magical texts that were transferred between Hebrew, Arabic, and Latin, languages with different morphologies and conventions, and also languages with similar but differing bodies of sacred scripture. Acculturation also takes place in the modern period when psychology becomes Sufi.

Sometimes, transfer may also involve appropriation, a difficult issue, and not only because appropriation implies the existence of exclusive cultural property, which may again be seen as essentialist. The difference between legitimate inspiration and re-use on the one hand, and illegitimate appropriation on the other, is not always clear, which is one reason why the topic is so sensitive. One important factor, as so often, is power relations. For some, any transfer that takes place in a context of unequal power relations is appropriation, which transforms most transfers into appropriation, as power relations are rarely precisely equal, even (for example) between Japan and the United States today.[16] More importantly, cultural transfer may not just take place in the context of unequal power relations but may actually reinforce the dominance of one group over another, for example when a school system replaces the language of the conquered with the language of the conqueror. This is what Richard A. Rogers would call "cultural dominance,"[17] and it is immediately obvious what the problem is: the less powerful group loses something that is central to its identity. It is also immediately obvious what the problem is with another classic form of cultural transfer, when objects that are important to the identity of less powerful groups are whisked across the world

into the museums of the powerful.[18] Physical appropriation of a physical object necessarily deprives the former owner(s) of their property. Cultural appropriation can also be problematic when this is not the case and when something that is not physical is appropriated, if the appropriation somehow has a harmful effect on the less prominent group, as when something that is important to the less powerful group is trivialized, commodified, or banalized by the more powerful in the eyes of all.[19] Desecration does not always have to be physical. When late premodern German Christians take Jewish magical texts and Christianize them, maintaining that the Jews can no longer use their own rituals, that is probably appropriation. When an English occultist learns the Islamic *ṣalāt* (ritual prayers) and incorporates elements of them into a new religion, that may or may not be appropriation, as no obvious harm is done to Islam. When Sufism is merged with psychology, perhaps Sufis are weakened by the adulteration of their faith, or perhaps they are strengthened by the new synthesis.

The debate about whether esotericism can usefully be understood as "Western" raises the question of whether or not there is a Jewish esotericism and an Islamic esotericism, and if so, how these relate to Western esotericism. Wouter Hanegraaff recently proposed that while there may have been occasional transfers between Western, Jewish, and Islamic esotericism, "Jewish and Islamic forms of 'esotericism' have emerged and developed as largely self-contained and relatively autonomous traditions, accessible during most of their histories only to pious Jews and Muslims within their own respective communities."[20] Liana Saif, Mark Sedgwick, and Francesco Piraino have argued against this in the case of Islam. For Saif, the medieval period saw a "cross-cultural transfer of ideas and practices that are central to the conceptualization of Western esotericism,"[21] and Sedgwick and Piraino have similarly argued that although Jewish, Christian, and Islamic discursive worlds are undoubtedly partly self-contained, there have also even periodic contacts and transfers.[22] Saif has proposed an "entangled history of esotericism" to replace a dichotomy between Western and Islamic.[23] Alternatively, if we consider esotericism as a discourse focused on an absolute and secret knowledge[24] that leads to elitist and sectarian organizational structures,[25] we can abandon the geographical and cultural frame altogether, finding esoteric discourses in various cultural and historical contexts. This contributes to the discussion about the relations among different religious phenomena, which could be the fruit of transfers or constructions, or could be universals which are not

archetypes or essences, but forms, discourses, everyday life practices, and emotions.

Two Transfers and a Construction

This book is divided into three parts, two on transfers and one on constructions. The first part, on transfers, focuses on the premodern period, ending in the seventeenth century, while the other focuses on the modern period, starting in the nineteenth century and continuing until the present.

In the first part, on premodern transfers, the focus is on Judaism, Islam, and Christianity—not the West. There are four text-based studies, two dealing primarily with poetry and thus with imagery and the mystical and two dealing with magic and thus with invocation and the esoteric. Two of these four chapters deal with all three "Abrahamic" religions, while one deals only with Judaism and Islam, and another only with Judaism and Christianity.

Andrea Gondos starts by stating one aspect of the problem that this book addresses: for whatever reason—and to explain this is not her objective—love is used in very similar ways as a rhetorical tool for the mediation of theological ideals and principles in Jewish, Christian, and Sufi mystical poetry. She analyzes the relationship of theology and language through the prism of how love as emotion is evoked, induced, and even prescribed in mystical sources. She contends that while religious tenets, language, and rituals differ between the three Abrahamic religions, emotional states such as love constitute a common vehicle to approach and access the Divine. To demonstrate this, she explores the caress and the kiss in Jewish kabbalistic compositions, going back to the thirteenth-century Rabbi Isaac Hacohen. From the Christian tradition she takes the commentary of Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) on the mythical encounter of Lysias and Phaedrus, and the images of the female mystics Beguine Hadewijch of Brabant (1200–1248) and Teresa of Avila (1515–1582). Finally, for Islam she takes Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207–1273) and Farid al-Din Attar (1145–1221).

Mark Wagner then takes us to a context where it is easy enough to see how transfer might occur, as the majority of the poems of the Yemeni Rabbi Salim Shabazi (1619–c. 1679, also known as Shalom Shabazi) used alternating stanzas of Hebrew and Arabic. Wagner shows that Shabazi's poetry uses many classic *ghazal* motifs that are also found in Sufi poetry, but which may or may not actually be Sufi, they are also used in secular

poetry. There is certainly transfer, but it may not be esoteric or mystical transfer, but purely artistic. Certain phrases and images used by Shabazi, however, are specifically Sufi, notably those shared with the Yemeni Sufi Ahmad ibn ʿAlwan (d. 1266). Here Wagner shows how a form of transfer of mystical themes can happen, and thus indicates one possible answer to the question that Gondos's chapter asks.

Turning to magic, Gal Sofer and Ildikó Glaser-Hille both show the usefulness of very detailed textual studies. Sofer examines Islamic, Christian, and Jewish formulas in the Solomonic corpus, the collection of texts attributed to King Solomon that is used to subdue and bind demons. These demonstrate not just transfer but also one result of earlier transfer: agreement. The consensus among premodern Jews, Christians, and Muslims was that King Solomon had power over demons. Within this agreement, however, there was also difference. First, it was often held that formulas from the relevant tradition should be used when dealing with demons from that particular tradition—one should refer to Jesus when dealing with a Christian demon and the Quran when dealing with a Muslim one. Sofer also traces the less deliberate transformation of names and other formulas over the centuries as texts are translated from one language to another, for example, in the Hebrew, Arabic, and Aramaic sources of the fifteenth-century Latin *Liber Bileth* (Book of Bileth).

Glaser-Hille then takes us through late premodern German demonic ritual magic, showing how the transfer of Jewish texts into Christian versions not only involved transformations similar to this demonstrated by Sofer but also served to construct Christianity as superior and Judaism as inferior, what she calls "magical supersession theology." Christian versions of the Jewish Hekhalot (palaces) literature, for example, asserted that the Jews had lost the power to use their own rituals effectively, and that this power had passed to the Christians. Christians also modified Jewish rituals by adding the Eucharist to them. The transformations she identifies are, as has been said, similar to those identified by Sofer, but a clear and coherent purpose is now also identified. What is going on, Glaser-Hille concludes, is not just transfer but also appropriation.

In the second part of this book, on modern transfers, the focus is on Judaism, Islam, and the West—not Christianity. There are five studies, drawing on archival material and also in two cases on interviews and anthropological fieldwork. All five chapters deal with the esoteric more than the mystical. One chapter deals not only with two of the three "Abrahamic" religions but with three modern Western systems

(Freemasons, Spiritists, and the Cosmic Movement), while three chapters deal only with Islam and modern Western systems (Thelema and psychology). Only one chapter touches on Judaism, and that mainly because its main subject was of Jewish origin.

Alexandre Toumarkine starts with a wide panorama in Tlemcen, Algeria, in the late nineteenth century. Tlemcen, though a midsize town, had a full range of esoteric groups: the Cosmic Movement of Max Théon (1848–1927), Freemasons, Spiritists, Jewish visitors to the tombs of medieval Kabbalists, and a number of Sufi tombs and *ṭarīqas* (orders). Only Christian mystics are absent. As Toumarkine shows, however, although these groups were all living in close proximity, there were barely any transfers at all between them. Instead, there was a lot of mutually hostile construction. The French authorities first distrusted and then tolerated the Sufis, whose beliefs Théon and the Spiritists dismissed as unscientific, as did some French observers. The Israelite Consistory of France sent Chief Rabbis from Alsace to civilize the local Jews, who were meanwhile excluded by the (often antisemitic) Masons. All these hostile constructions, then, prevented any transfers.

Rasoul Namazi takes us to Germany and then across the Atlantic to the University of Chicago, where the German–American political philosopher Leo Strauss (1899–1973) taught, and later became known for the impact of his "Neo-Straussian" students on the development of Neo-Conservatism. Namazi shows how Strauss's understanding of "esoteric writing" helped him solve what he called "the theologico-political problem," the issue of the relationship between religion and politics. This problem led Strauss to Spinoza (1632–1677) and Maimonides (1138–1204), and Maimonides led him to Alfarabi (Abu Nasr Muhammad al-Farabi, 872–950), who Strauss saw as the great practitioner of esoteric writing, a writing between the lines that allowed an esoteric premodern Enlightenment that preceded the better-known exoteric Enlightenment. Maimonides, too, was part of this premodern Enlightenment, and Strauss finally concluded that "Maimonides in his beliefs was *absolutely* no Jew." This transfer from the premodern Muslim Alfarabi to the modern Jewish-born Western Strauss, then, allowed the construction of a new view of the history of philosophy, and also of esotericism. Strauss's esotericism was in no way religious; Namazi terms it "philosophical esotericism." Whether or not Strauss was correct, the construction is impressive.

Returning to the Mediterranean, Marco Pasi then examines the relationship with Islam of the English occultist Aleister Crowley (1875–1947),

looking at both constructions and transfers. On the one hand, Crowley constructed a particular image of Islam. On the other hand, there were transfers, visible when one finds structural similarities between Islam and Crowley's new religion, Thelema. Pasi starts off by showing that Crowley knew much more about Islam than is generally thought: he even learned some Quran in Arabic, and how to perform the *ṣalāt*. Crowley's relationship with Islam, then, is very different from Max Théon's. So far as transfers are concerned, Thelema drew above all on the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, not on Islam, but Islam may have provided the model for some aspects of Thelema, especially its sacred history, and several aspects of its practice may be inspired by the *ṣalāt*. For constructions, Pasi draws attention to the importance of the model associated with the British explorer and writer Richard Burton (1821–1890), who Crowley much admired. Like Burton, Crowley romanticized Islam, including Muslim attitudes to sexuality, and understood Sufism as pantheism. He considered Islam greatly preferably to Christianity. Pasi does not explore this aspect of his topic, but one might wonder to what extent Crowley's use of Islam might be seen as appropriation, however (relatively) great his admiration for it.

The two remaining chapters in this part of the book examine transfers between Sufism and modern psychology. Francesco Piraino looks at the Italian Sufi shaykh Gabriele Mandel (1926–2010), and how he merged Islam, psychoanalysis, and Western esotericism into one single construction. Piraino reconstructs Mandel's biography to show how he started with psychoanalysis and the de-Islamized Sufism of Idries Shah (1924–1996), and then replaced Shah with the Islamic Sufism of the Jerrahiyya-Halvetiyya *ṭarīqa* of the Turkish shaykh Muzaffer Ozak (1916–1985), which led to the Islamization of Mandel's Sufism and of his following. Even so, Mandel continued to merge psychoanalysis and Sufism, both in theory and in practice, using "Sufi" therapies based on music, dance, and colors. It is hard to say which element in this combination was uppermost, what the direction of transfer was, or what was being appropriated and what was appropriating. The resulting construction, however, was neither homogenous nor enduring. Even in Mandel's lifetime, different followers focused on different elements, taking what they liked and ignoring what they did not like, to produce what Piraino calls "a fragmented Sufi Order," a fragmentation that did not survive Mandel's death. The Jerrahiyya-Halvetiyya of Milan is becoming ever more like that of Istanbul.

Mark Sedgwick then looks at the history of the Enneagram, a "universal symbol" first used in Russia in 1916 by the Armenian esotericist George Gurdjieff (1866–1949). Sedgwick shows two processes of transfer, which ultimately produced a triangle rather than the pair like those that other chapters have examined. During the first process, from about 1952 to the 1980s, users of the Enneagram in esoteric milieus in Europe, North America, and South America appropriated elements of psychology to produce the "enneagram of personality," which became a widely used personality test that is now often constructed as being of scientific rather than esoteric origin. During the second process, from about 1973 to 1995, a series of Western Sufis appropriated the Enneagram, giving it a mythical Sufi origin. This allowed four other Western Sufis to then transform the Enneagram into a Sufi practice. In the cases of the American Laleh Bakhtiar (born 1938) and the Frenchman Amanoullah de Vos (born c. 1948), both of whom had a background in psychology, the result was a synthesis in which Sufism was dominant. In the two other cases, of Hamidah Torres and Abdul Karim Baudino (born 1969), both Argentinian Sufis, the Sufism was less dominant. Sedgwick argues that while the transfer of psychology into esotericism during the first process examined in the chapter was unidirectional, during the second process the transfer was bidirectional, with esoteric psychology being appropriated by Sufism, and Sufism being simultaneously esotericized and psychologized.

In the third and final part of this book, on esoteric and mystical constructions, the focus is once again on Judaism, Islam, and the West—not on Christianity. There are three studies, again drawing on archival material. Two chapters deal with mysticism, and one with esotericism. One deconstructs modern constructions of one particular topic—the relationship between Sufism and Kabbalah—and two look at modern individuals who constructed grand systems, one an American of Christian origin and one an Albanian of Muslim origin. Just as transfer often involves construction, these two constructions involved massive transfer.

Boaz Huss starts with a study of the construction of Sufism and of Kabbalah as closely related forms of mysticism. Although there may indeed be resemblances between the two and although there were definitely important cultural contacts between Jews and Arabs in other areas, proven contacts between Kabbalists and Sufis were actually few and superficial, as Huss shows, meaning that little actual transfer can have taken place. Despite this, scholars, practitioners, and activists have repeatedly asserted a far closer relationship than the evidence supports. The explanation is in

part political, but is most importantly the well-established classification of both Kabbalah and Sufism as "mysticism." This chapter provides an exhaustive study of this construction.

In the next chapter, Vadim Putzu takes us back to North America, providing a detailed study of one man who agreed with the constructions of Sufism and of Kabbalah that Huss has discussed but took them even further. Thomas Moore Johnson (1851–1919) understood Neoplatonism as perennial wisdom and synthesized an all-encompassing system that seamlessly reconciled not only Kabbalah with Plato and Plotinus but also with the Tarot and Sufism. Johnson's construction of "Platonism," which also drew on Western esotericism, was spread and promoted in his journal *The Platonist*, but his activity was not purely intellectual. He was also an active member of the Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor.

Finally, Gianfranco Bria takes us to Albania, where another grand perennialist scheme was constructed on Western esoteric and Islamic bases by Ferid Vokopola (1887–1969), an important politician and also himself a Sufi. This chapter describes and explains Vokopola's system, which was based around the transmission of "the mysteries" from antiquity to contemporary Sufis, and then shows how it draws on Western esoteric sources, notably Édouard Schuré (1841–1929) and, to a lesser extent, the Theosophical Society and Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925). Bria argues that in some ways Vokopola's system was comparable to that of Guénon. It also drew on Islamic sources, notably on Sufism, especially Bektashism. Bria suggests that Vokopola's motivation may have been in part political, as the ideology of "Albanism" was inherently pluralist.

Conclusion

We have seen, then, how religious identity boundaries have been blurred, crossed, and sometimes reinforced. Boundaries were blurred in premodern Jewish, Christian, and Sufi mystical poetry, where love was used in very similar ways as a rhetorical tool for the mediation of theological ideals and principles. Boundaries were crossed with relatively little modification when mystical themes were transferred from Sufi to Jewish mystical poetry in seventeenth-century Yemen, and with more modification when names and other formulas were translated from one language to another within the Solomonic corpus in the fifteenth century and when Jewish magical

texts were transformed into Christian versions in late premodern Germany, the latter modifications being an instance of appropriation.

The diffusionists, then, are not wrong. Between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, esoteric and mystical ideas have often been transferred. This has not always happened, however: despite physical proximity in late-nineteenth-century Algeria, religious identity boundaries were reinforced rather than crossed or blurred through mutually hostile construction.

We have also seen how construction happens. Sometimes it is clear and indeed imposes essentialist categories, as in the cases of the general construction of Sufism and Kabbalah as closely related forms of mysticism, the construction of Neoplatonism as perennial wisdom in nineteenth-century America, and the construction of perennialism as "the mysteries" in twentieth-century Albania.

The deconstructionists, then, are not wrong either. Sometimes, however, it is less clear what is going on. As we have suggested above, transfer and construction can usefully be understood lying as on a continuum. Was Straussian "esoteric writing," which framed Spinoza very differently, a construction as arbitrary and essentialist as the perennialist constructions were, or was it a case of transfer (with or without modification) from premodern Judaism and Islam into the modern West? Crowley's Thelema was certainly a construction, but elements of Islam were also transferred into it, with important modifications. Was this appropriation? Mandel's Sufi spirituality was again a construction, but it was neither arbitrary nor essentialist, and the Sufism that was transferred into it was only partly modified. The Sufi Enneagram is, equally, a construction, but the Sufism that was transferred into it was more or less modified depending on the Enneagramist. Again, it is unclear whether or not this involved appropriation.

This book's empirical case studies of esoteric and mystical transfers between and constructions within Judaism, Christianity, Western esotericism, and Islam show clear transfers, clear constructions, and intermediate cases. Transfer and construction, then, are not binary alternatives; they are points on a continuum.

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PART I

Premodern Transfers

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CHAPTER 2

Seekers of Love: The Phenomenology of Emotion in Jewish, Christian, and Sufi Mystical Sources

Andrea Gondos

Love is to give what one does not have.
(Jacques Lacan, Seminar V)

Over the past several decades, the study of emotion has become an important area of scholarly inquiry in the humanities, the social sciences, and the life sciences, spanning such diverse fields of research as anthropology, sociology, history, political science, religion, literature, psychology, brain sciences, and biology. As far back as the ancient Greek philosophers, we find that Aristotle (385–323 B.C.) devotes significant discussions in his

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Rhetoric to *pathê tês psychês* or affections of the soul (emotions). His interest in the phenomenon of emotions is to highlight ways in which the rhetorician can affect and manipulate the passions of the audience. Even today, his acute observations regarding basic emotional states such as anger, envy, shame, and pity have remained relevant.[1]

Empiricist philosophers such as John Locke (1632–1704) and David Hume (1711–1776) tended to conflate emotions with external sensations and emphasize that "since emotions arise from thoughts and perceptions, they immediately move their subjects to actions."[2] William James (1842–1910), by contrast, argued that emotions are generated by changes in the body, are epiphenomenal, but do not cause any action. Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) introduced several novel conceptualizations of emotions modifying James's position by stating that emotions indeed can constitute causes that lead to actions; emotions are not identical with feelings but get articulated by them; and finally, that feelings are not merely bodily processes but are inherently capable of expressing the emotional states associated with them.[3] While psychoanalysts and philosophers have grappled with and succeeded in offering useful theoretical models with which to describe and analyze emotions, in areas of religion, religious thought, and experience, the role of emotions is only now beginning to receive sustained attention. With this chapter, I wish to contribute to the study of the role of emotions in religion and more specifically as refracted through the lens of mystical texts in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

My main argument rests on the premise that language deployed in mystical texts provides a unique tool for deconstructing how emotions function as critical elements of the rhetoric aimed at producing affected states of heightened spiritual awareness in readers. By focusing on the concept of love drawn from select mystical sources in the three monotheistic traditions, I wish to examine embodied representations of love, deploying sources that depict the body as the locus and center of transformation for the attainment of mystical fulfillment. To be sure, I wish to challenge the paradigm of Martha Nussbaum, who invokes Proust's definition of emotion as "geological upheavals of thought,"[4] seeing them fundamentally as derivatives of cognitive processes. Instead, my analysis is informed by the conclusions of William James and James Hillman who regard emotions, at their core, as a subterranean energy fields that connect in ways that are subliminal and unbound by rational discourse, control, or reasoning.[5] Thus, while theorists of emotions are engaged primarily in defining, analyzing, and describing emotions, mystical writers aim to also rouse feelings both in themselves and in their audience.[6] As Ronald de Sousa incisively

notes, it is the acquisition of narrative form that distinguishes human emotions from those experienced by animals and therefore the phonological and semantic properties of language are the building blocks of mediating emotions in order to explain and make sense of our own actions and the world around us.[7] Through the act of reading and the attendant meditation on the semantic aspects of the text "the self but also other readers go through the emotional processes that the writing incites."[8]

Love constitutes a paradigmatic emotion that is frequently deployed by mystics in the Abrahamic traditions that offers a counterpoint to ratiocinative discourse transporting the reader into a direct and intimate knowledge of the divine that stands in contrast to indirect knowledge that logic and scholastic argumentation engender.[9] As a subcategory of emotion, love reflects the etymological root of the word, the Latin *emovere*, denoting movement, protrusion, and the act of expelling. The philological root of the word certainly applies to how love as an emotive state encompasses a complex system of dialectical motions of withdrawal and disclosure that affect a transformation both in the subject, the one who loves, and the object, the beloved. Thus one might further posit that through love we move and we are moved, we transform and we are transformed in return. In the realm of the religious, love acts as a potent force that establishes relationality and to some extent reciprocity between the Creator and the created being providing a portal of renewed possibility for the created being to return to the Creator. Defined by James Hillman as elemental energy—unseen and unknowable yet perpetually in motion—love, as other emotive states, can function as an effective mediating force between the material, cognitive, and spiritual dimensions of the human being.[10]

A frequently contested aspect in the discourse on love is the admissibility of the erotic dimensions in religious texts, narratives, and experiences. Two paradigmatic attitudes have developed, one that regards the erotic as contrary to the fundamental spiritual and transcendent character of religion and another, frequently espoused by mystics, that considers the erotic as an integral facet of unifying with the divine. The first position, as we will see in the work of Anders Nygren, seeks to emphasize the ontological gap between God and the human being, while the second, adopted in the theologies of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim mystics discussed in this paper, endeavor to close this gap and underscore the great religious value of emotive states, such as love, that engage both the physical as well as the spiritual facets of one's being. Taking inspiration from the biblical book, the *Song of Songs*, mystical treatises have highlighted that unification with

God demands totality and complete devotion including the physical, the cognitive, the psychological, and the spiritual aspects of the human being.[11] Embodiment, the deployment of the body as a vessel for closeness to and unification with God, in the mystical texts examined here intensifies the mystical experience and renders it more complete.

Anders Nygren's monumental work, *Agape and Eros*,[12] developed a definition of love, informed by Christological ideals and values, as constituted of binary forces that were fundamentally irreconcilable, one arising from the flesh, "vulgar eros," and another, detached from physicality and animated by the spirit, "agape."[13] By locating eros in the human-centered orientation of the Hellenic world while associating agape with a divine-centered Christian theology, Nygren created an arbitrary stratification between contrasting forms of love—one debased, arising from matter, and another sublime, deriving from the spirit—that were epistemologically mutually exclusive. This formulation of love forestalls the possibility of exposing a more nuanced dialectic of human–divine and interhuman relationality.[14] Furthermore, the sources discussed in this chapter reveal that for many Jewish, Christian, and Sufi mystics the relationship between the body and the soul or heart was much more imbricated, their boundaries enmeshed, to the extent that any discussion of love involves in more complicated and subtle ways the participation of various aspects of a human being. These texts also expose a view that assigns high religious value to the darker registers of human emotions, love through violence, pain, and self-destruction. Particularly in Sufi conceptualizations, the divine can only be approached through heating the fire of love in the follower's heart. As the heart dissolves in the flames of passion, it reunites with the finer substance of divine light.

In this chapter, the concept of love will form the main pivot of analysis and will engage related phenomena of desire, rapture, and physical expressions of attachment (kiss), paying close attention to poetics or language through which affection becomes articulated. I am particularly interested in embodied and transgressive forms of love where carnal love functions not merely as a vehicle abetting religious transformation but as the locus of emerging possibilities for uniting with the divine. I argue further that by interrogating the narrative elements of religious texts we are able to gain a better understanding of how religious texts affect and shape emotive states and how the noncognitive dimensions of the inscribed word inspire pietism in and mystical ideals in various religious traditions.

Embodied Love in Kabbalah

Deploying the concept of isomorphism, kabbalistic texts, in contrast to Neoplatonic models, establish a parallel between dimensions of the divine and the human form, depicting embodied love less in terms of a physiological transformation but more as a semiotic marker of devotion where an incorporeal yet often anthropomorphically depicted Creator encounters the corporeal yet animistic human being. One of the most prevalent symbolic manifestations of union and "comingling of the imminent with the transcendent"[15] in kabbalistic texts is the image of a kiss and caress, which I will explore below in diverse kabbalistic sources from the Middle Ages to the sixteenth century.

An early medieval kabbalistic composition on the left emanation written by Rabbi Isaac Hacohen (thirteenth century) entitled "Discourse on the Left Emanation" deploys the erotic images of the kiss and caress to describe the gradual mechanism by which the last of the ten *Sefirot*, *Malkuth*, ascends toward and becomes incorporated into the pleroma of the upper *Sefirot*:

> We have received a tradition that *Malkuth* also has three powers that look like three pillars to carry her work and keep her servants about while turning her throne in dread, trembling, and silence [moving] from one emanation to the next all the way to the Beloved [*Tiferet*], who kisses and caresses her with the mediation of *Yesod*, the foundation of the world. And from there, forces of the *Sefirot Hesed* and *Gevurah* receive her in great, splendid, and glorious awe, trembling, and silence. *Hesed* and *Gevurah*, the concealed [upper] *Sefirot* receive her and from them the likeness of mighty rivers of water burst forth that appear like sparks of fire, "the flames of God (*Yah*)." And *Malkuth* is ensconced and hidden from all emanation inside them until the Ruler of *Binah* arrives with its retinue and receives her in awe, trembling, and silence, and raises her until the throne reaches the throne of glory associated with repentance. From there its great forces appear presided over by the Ruler of *Hokhmah*, who reigns over all of them. Then the chair is placed in the burning sweat and great trembling that shake the bosom of primordial *Hokhmah* and there she is received with the song, "come my bride," and the *Sefirah* of *Hokhmah* delights in her as a father delights in his daughter, the unique one among the sons.[16]

In this passage the erotic tension that characterizes the relationship between the feminine divine hypostasis, *Malkuth*, and its male

counterpart, *Tiferet*, is seen as indispensable in generating energy to promote the subsequent rise and return of the emanatory chain to its ultimate source in the higher *Sefirot* where the erotic energy between the male and female powers of the godhead becomes more attenuated and sublimated into love, characterized less by bodily and more by filial terms, that exists between father and daughter. The image of kissing and caressing at the lower rungs of the divine being serves to unite the male and female energies and facilitate the rise of *Malkuth* which upon attaining the higher levels of *Hokhmah* and *Binah* draws down blessings back into the lower worlds.

In another treatise from the sixteenth century, by the Safed Kabbalist, Rabbi Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz (1500–1576),[17] the kiss is sharply distinguished from *devekut* or attachment and is regarded as a more ideal form of unification. He cites the teaching of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai from the Zohar to argue that *devekut* simply means the reciprocal cleaving of the righteous to God which can be attained already in a person's lifetime. Through labor and study of Torah, the righteous attain the presence of God by drawing down the *Shekhinah*, who will abide among them. By contrast, a kiss is the only vehicle to produce an unmediated joining between the soul and its divine source, generating *unio mystica*, and this is not possible except in death. Citing the biblical example of Moses dying by a kiss, Alkabetz (1500–1580) surmises that Moses's death denotes the total assimilation and fusion of division and individuality, the prophet Moses, into ontological completeness, the divinity. At the temporal level, argues Alkabetz, a kiss is like the merger of time—days, weeks, and years—into the great Jubilee year.[18] Therefore, both in its physical and temporal dimensions, the kiss produces a direct union with the *Shekhinah*, affecting her restoration and redemption.

Rabbi Elijah de Vidas (1518–1587), an important Kabbalist active at the same time in Safed as Rabbi Alkabetz, eclipsed earlier attempts to offer a comprehensive articulation of love in his ethical compendium, *Reshit Hokhmah* (The Beginning of Wisdom) which has enjoyed great popularity since its appearance in print in the sixteenth century.[19] In his discourse on love, de Vidas draws on the biblical exemplar of the relationship between David and Jonathan to embellish the concept of attachment with further ethical and theological dimensions. In particular he focuses on the scene of parting in the biblical narrative when David and Jonathan engage in embracing, kissing, and weeping.[20] Offering first a psychological reading of the verse, de Vidas explains, "while the kiss is an expression of love,

tears stem from passionate attachment" before he engages in a more kabbalistically inspired deconstruction of this emotionally charged scene:

> The reason why David was crying more than Jonathan is that David, the sweet singer of Israel, represents the mystery of the *Shekhinah* in exile. Both David and Jonathan are symbolic representations of the love between the Holy One and the *Shekhinah*, torn apart by their separation due to her exile.[21]

Kissing constitutes a frequently recurring leitmotif in the Zohar, the medieval Kabbalistic classic, that serves as the most important intertext in de Vidas's hermeneutic exposition.[22] There are three main conceptualizations of kiss in the Zohar. First, as a means of unifying different parts of the divinity corresponding to four letters of the Hebrew word for love (אהבה, *ahavah*), each letter representing four spirits that are present in the kiss. Each of these spirits "comprise all the others, are joined to them and all cleave to one another with perfect union."[23] Second, the kiss also signifies eschatological dimensions as a form of mystical attachment to and union with God which stems originally from the description of the death of Moses, who is said to have died by the mouth of God (*'al pi Adonai*).[24] As Adam Afterman notes, the divine forces in the higher worlds are characterized by a more profound sense of unity than the one existing in the material world. These higher forces are unified through the aspect of the kiss and the symbol of the kiss is used in the Zohar to denote the entrance of a human being into their world.[25] This notion is further underscored by Moses Maimonides (1138–1204), the medieval Jewish philosopher, who draws a distinction between the notion of intense erotic love of the transcendent divinity one the one hand and the phenomenon of "the kiss of death." Maimonides notes that the latter is an act in which the love and apprehension of God by the Patriarchs and Moses are conflated into a merger with the Active Intellect and therefore represents the most complete form of unification.[26] The third deployment of the kiss in the Zohar is meant to signify the merger of the souls of members of the Zohar's mystical community, whose spirits coalesce into a unified bundle and unite with the divinity. Several examples can be found in rabbinic texts that allude to the physical act of kissing, as students kiss the hand of their master after study as a gesture of gratitude for spiritual sustenance,[27] or teachers kiss their disciples on the head as a form of initiation ritual.[28] In these sources, the kiss comes to allude not merely to the joining of two bodies but also the commingling of two souls into one: "When one kisses another,

the breaths of both mingle, and as a result the spirits (*ruach*) of both cleave together forming one."[29]

In the Zohar, the kiss is often given by the mouth producing a unique metaphysical dynamic in which love based on passionate attachment gets expressed as spirit (*ruach*) cleaving to spirit (*ruach*):

> When one kisses another, the breaths of both mingle, and as a result, the spirits of both cleave together forming one. Their love therefore is one love. The spiritual bond of love uniting the Holy One and His *Shekhinah* is likened to the merging of breaths which comes about in a human kiss of love, which... produces four "spirits."[30]

The bond that is formed between two human beings through the agency of the physical act of kissing is transfigured into a theurgical act that unifies the diverse manifestations of the divine being creating a strong throne and protective structure for the Shekhinah's unification with the Holy One, the female and male aspects of the divinity. From a psychological perspective, the breaths of the lovers that co-mingle multiply in the act of kissing intensifying both desire and attachment: "the man has now two breaths: his own, as well as that of his beloved. In the same way, the woman also has two breaths, her own and his together. Their kiss has brought about a merging of four breaths, and in the spiritual realm, these four breaths correspond to the four spirits that the Zohar expounds."[31] To be sure, the four breaths generated by the kiss at the physical level are transfigured into four spirits in the divine world that act in unison to infuse all levels of existence—both the bodily and the non-material—with love and joy. At the same time, they are also effective agents against negative emotional states—depression, sadness, and anger—that in the theosophic system of Kabbalah serve as vehicles for the forces of the demonic side, the *sitra ahra*, that relentlessly strives to lure the created world away from holiness and toward its own realm. In the divine pleroma, the four breaths unify all the *Sefirot* or divine emanations into a strong bond creating a throne for the *Shekhinah* where she can be unified with her consort without the distraction and disruption of the husks (*kelipot*) or forces of evil.[32]

Love as Dissolution in the Christian Humanist Discourse of Marsilio Ficino

The idea that love is an essential component of the universe is expressed already in ancient Greek literature, particularly in Plato's *Symposium*. Phaedrus in a long discourse presents eros as ontologically concomitant with the primordial forces of Earth and Chaos. In another account given by a woman, Diotima, eros is depicted as a child generated from the duality of poverty on the one hand and plenty/resource on the other. Just as the feasts of Dionysius were characterized by both asceticism and ecstasy, here too the "duality of eros, at one moment poor and needy, at another filled with vision of the beautiful itself."[33] The psychological and epistemological gap between lacking and possessing, desiring and obtaining, deprivation and fulfillment places eros as an important mediating force not only between the lover and the beloved, the subject and the object, but also between the created material world and the realm of spiritual entities or ideas. It is in fact the paradox of deficiency and excess that creates a kind of "ladder of love" that drives the soul to ascend through successive steps and stages of acquiring new objects of desire, each one higher and more refined than the previous, moving the subject closer to its eternal source. Plato sees love therefore as a catalyst and psychic force that can effectively spur the soul from its attachment to matter to its ascent by way of spiritual rungs to ultimately reconnect the human with the divine.

Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), the influential Renaissance humanist scholar, depicts love invoking striking physiological imagery, commenting on Plato's *Symposium*. In this account, love causes the erasure of the physical boundaries separating the subject from the object and the subsequent commingling of their blood which produces a further surge in their arousal.[34] In Ficino's account the external physical and the internal psychological and chemical processes are indelibly intertwined causing fusion between subject and object and obviating any division between them. He illustrates this process by way of deconstructing the erotically charged meeting between the Theban Orator, Lysias, and the object of his desire, the young man Phaedrus. In the meeting between these two men, the eyes serve as the sensory catalyst for the initial encounter between their spirits, which is followed by gradual onset of a series of chemical reactions that transform first their blood and subsequently their entire being at the core:

> Lysias, a plaything, stares with mouth agape at the face of Phaedrus. Phaedrus aims the sparks of his own eyes into the eyes of Lysias, and with these sparks he sends spirit toward Lysias. In this mutual encounter of eyes, the ray of Phaedrus readily blends with that of Lysias, and spirit easily conjoins with spirit.
>
> This vapor of spirit, generated from the heart of Phaedrus, at once speeds toward Lysias' heart... What happens is therefore amazing: Phaedrus' blood is now in Lysias' heart!... Lysias says to Phaedrus, 'O Phaedrus, my heart! My dearest inward parts!' Phaedrus says to Lysias, 'O Lysias, my spirit, my blood.'[35]

One of the interesting features of this narrative is that speech as a way of connectivity between two people is ancillary to arousal expedited by the sense of sight. Instead, the interaction between Lysias and Phaedrus is depicted as an exchange between continuously flowing energy fields that can suddenly react with the natural disposition of another body without permitting any form of rational control. The subjective gushing of universal energy initiates a chain of chemical reactions throughout the body to the point where the two distinct corporeal entities merge as one. The protagonists of this scene, Lysias and Phaedrus, are depicted as passive respondents to forces that require the raw vessel of the flesh to stay vital and revitalize using the emotion of love to draw human beings into the exuberant dance of creation. Through the arousal of the heart the entire body is created anew with blood reenergizing the cells transfiguring living into exuberant being.

Love as Speech in Christian Mystical Discourse

The mystical discourse and the writings of one important Christian female mystic, the medieval Beguine Hadewijch of Brabant (1200–1248), provide an especially fertile ground for fostering spirituality through embodied emotions. Speaking of the divine through poetry is depicted by Hadewijch as not only a powerful means of awakening love in the inner person of the speaker but also diffusing this love in the hearts of members of her own community: "You must gladly speak of God. This is a criterion of Minne (Love), that the name of the Beloved is found sweet. Saint Bernard speaks of this: 'Jesus is honey in the mouth.' To speak of the Beloved is exceedingly sweet; for it awakens Love immeasurably."[36] In another poem, the repetitive refrain of the word "love" uttered by the lips

and the ambiguous movement back and forth between the signifier and the signified acts as a kind of hypnotic dance between the lover and the beloved and conjures the mood of intense intimacy with the divine. In this passage the word "love" becomes a rhetorical invocation to initiate the mantric recitation that invites the partners into a trance-like meditative state of mutual absorption and ecstasy: "O love, were I love, and with love, love you, love, O love, for love, give that love which love may know wholly as love."[37]

In the Christian mystical poetics of the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic, Teresa of Avila (1515–1582), we see the deployment of images of theoeroticism through the evocation of the bodily senses that are overpowered by the calling of the Divine for his beloved, the human soul:

> I am very anxious sisters to make you understand this operation of love but I know not how; for it seems a contradiction that the Beloved (though not seen) should let the soul clearly perceive he is in her; and He seems to call her by a sign so certain that it cannot be doubted, and with a whistle so penetrating that she cannot help hearing it; for it seems that when the Spouse thus speaks to her she is in the Seventh Mansion; and all the people who are in the other mansions, viz. the senses, the imagination, and the faculties dare not stir.[38]

The doctrine of incarnation plays a pivotal role in Teresa's mystical theology,[39] which envisions the body as a critical axis for the sacred encounter between the human and the divine. Echoing Ficino's depiction of love as arising from the senses and then traversing complex routes of physiological transformations, Teresa posits not the sense of sight but that of hearing as the primary orifice through which God summons the soul and becomes enfleshed in it. The erotic interplay between the descending divinity and the ascending soul becomes manifest in the immaterialized sound of the whistle that phallically penetrates the soul until it assumes a form therein.

> This (whistle) operates so powerfully in the soul that she even consumes herself with longing, yet knows not what to ask, because she is strongly persuaded that her God is with her.[40]

At the next stage of the *hieros gamos* that ensues between the lover and beloved, desire becomes more internalized as it undergoes transmutation into suffering and pain that paradoxically reinvigorates and regenerates

desire, beckoning further visitation by the divine eros. It is this enduring process of mutual traversal of spiritual betrothal—threatening annihilation which never quite eventuates—that perpetuates the erotic dance between the mystic's soul and God:

> She suffers and thus this pain pierces even into her very bowels, and that when He who wounds her draws forth the dart, he seems therewith to tear them away [the bowels], so powerful are the sentiments of love....
>
> If a small spark should fly out from a pan of live coals (for such is my God), and fall upon a soul in such a way as to make her feel the fire enkindled, and yet be not sufficient to consume her, she continues in the pain which is so delightful when the sparks touch her they cause this operation.[41]

The recurring images of suffering, fire, and pain as integral elements of Teresa's rhetoric underline the notion that Eros is inherently bound to Thanatos,[42] a topos ubiquitous in Sufi mystical poetry, to which I now turn.

Love as Dissolution, Destruction, and Annihilation in Sufi Texts

The Sufi poetry of Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207–1273) will serve as the point of departure for engaging the concept of love and emotions in Islamic mysticism. Reciprocity and mutual attraction are underlined by Rumi as a key principle in his doctrine of mystical love: "[A]s the beggar is in love with bounty and in love with the bountiful giver, so the bounty of the bountiful giver is in love with the beggar."[43]

Rumi uses the image of a hunt, with a distinctive allusion to the intrinsically violent and destructive nature of such a quest, which begins with a physical desire to acquire and overpower the object. As the pursuit begins, the pursuer follows only the marked footsteps of the animal, using his sense of sight to track the game. Yet, as the distance between subject and object diminishes, carnality is transfigured into a delicate dynamic as the hunter begins to let the scent of the deer's musk gland, a more subtle and transcendent sense, guide him finally to the prey. In a revealing passage Rumi returns to the idea that the corporeal serves as a requisite, albeit lower, stage for the journey between the human soul and the divine from where it ascends to more elevated and spiritual registers: "Cleave to the footprints of the deer and advance safely, that from the deer's footprints you may attain to the musk gland."[44]

Hunting is a particularly daring and expressive metaphor for the process by which the soul ensconced in a fundamentally antagonistic encasement of the body must somehow set itself free and pursue the potentially precarious path back to its source. The hunt draws both the pursuer and the pursued into unknown and dangerous terrain and a failure to unite may result in annihilation and death. On the other hand, the merger of the soul with the Beloved must also by its very transformation result in physical dissolution and therefore as the journey to God commences from within the flesh, it concludes with its complete annihilation. The release of the soul and its subsequent ascent demand a violent end as the straw is consumed by the flames in which it is transmuted:

> The love of the loved ones illumines the cheeks; the love of the lover consumes his soul.
>
> The amber loves [the straw] with the appearance of wanting naught, [while] the straw is making efforts [to advance] on that long road.[45]

A central tenet that informs Rumi's mystical theology is the concept of annihilation or *fanā'*, and he underlines its importance by calling his own magnum opus "the store for *faqr*," the place where one can acquire poverty (and so annihilation).[46] Everything in the created world, Rumi reveals, proceeds through successive stages of dissolution as the various souls move from inferior to more advanced and sublime forms of *fanā'*. In his theory of love, Rumi uses the image of devouring and devoured to illustrate the progressive return of all things in the created universe through a series of assimilation or annihilation into higher aspects of being:

> The grace of God bestows a throat on the earth, so that it may drink water and make a hundred herbs grow.
>
> Again, He bestows on the creature of earth [the animal] a throat and a lip, in order that it may eat its [the earth's] herbage out of desire.
>
> When the animal has eaten its herbage, it becomes fat: thus, the animal becomes human food and disappears....
>
> There is no end to the explanation of this matter. I have given you only a portion: you may know the remaining portion [by analogy].
>
> Know that the whole world is eating and being eaten; know that those who have everlasting life [in God] are fortunate and accepted.[47]

In this understanding dissolution, devouring and dying comprise natural points of transformation in the universe as the material boundaries that separate between and among created beings are effaced and each lower form of existence is transmuted into a higher form from which it originated. In the created universe, the force that initiates this "evolutionary assimilation" is divine love, which activates a cycle of attractions that draw similar entities, congeners (Arabic: *jins*), toward each other. Love functions both as a potent energy responsible for movement and growth through mutual attraction while at the same time generating unification and unity through mutual absorption. Through the assimilation of one congener into another, particularity and individuality give way to homogeneity and oneness and as "everything is devoured by love, except love."[48]

An even more poignant image that adumbrates the necessity for pain, suffering, and complete dissolution in the pursuit of love is articulated by the twelfth-century Marv-based Persian author, Ahmad al-Samʿani (d. 1140), in his book, *Rawh al-arwah* (The Repose of Spirits). By applying an analogy between a burnt object that catches easily once fire is applied because it has already passed through the catharsis of the flames and the soul, Samʿani expresses a striking theology of love. He explains that a person who is self-absorbed and cares only about how to "make" or construct the self is like a new cloth that is impervious to fire and therefore cannot burn. Love demands its own kindling that is analogous to itself, characterized by the quiddity of love, which is fire and burning. The burnt individual is one who has suffered so much that any more trauma would result in complete disintegration:

> Fire comes out from the curtain of concealment into the open and throws out sparks. When it does not see any confidant, it pulls back its head until it finds something already burnt. Then it catches and brightens the world. In the same way, the fire of love will never catch in any self-seeing man of wealth or any refractory sultan. Rather, it will catch in a person so burnt that if you tested him by poking your finger on a spot of his heart, it will fall to pieces.[49]

The mystical doctrine of suffering as a necessary element for perfecting the mystic's love of God is poignantly articulated by the eleventh, early twelfth-century, Persian Sufi mystic, Rashid al-Din Maybudi (d. 1126). He interprets the banishment of Adam from Paradise as an event that initiated an ontological gap between the vision of beauty that God bequeathed

of Himself to Adam and the subsequent absence of and longing for that vision. The remembrance of the vision and its pursuit in the course of one's lifetime through trials and tribulations allow human beings to regain the experience of God's self-revelation in Paradise and in the process perfect their love for God.[50] Thus, earthly passions retain the tension between the erotic and the sacred aspects of love that seem to mutually reinforce each other in the mystic's path to God rather than pose as irreconcilable and contradictory attributes.

A theologically more radical conceptualization of love is presented in the acclaimed work, *The Conference of the Birds*, written by the twelfth-century Persian mystic, Farid al-Din Attar (1145–1221).[51] In his formulation, he follows closely the arguably heterodox tenets of the ninth-/tenth-century mystic Mansur al-Hallaj (858–922), who held that Iblis, or Satan, loved God the most among the angels even to the point that he defied God's command to prostrate himself before Adam, vowing to bow only to God.[52] To illustrate the power of love, Attar presents the story of a Sufi shaykh who risks losing his life together with his soul by falling passionately in love with a Christian girl. In spite of his great erudition and fervent piety, the shaykh is assailable by the flames of love which attack and scorch his entire being. He exclaims in great agony: "I have spent so many nights denying my ego, but not one of those nights tortured me like this. I am a wick—I have no rest because I burn. Nothing is left in me except my heart's blood. I am a candle that burns and melts through the night, only to be snuffed out by daybreak."[53]

The tension between the shaykh's ascetic former life and the all-consuming suffering brought on by the pangs of love culminates in the shaykh abandoning his faith, conceding to the girl's four wishes to ultimately renounce the Muslim path and bow to an idol. Only the intervention of a faithful disciple before the Prophet saves the shaykh from losing his soul. Orthodoxy is reinforced at the end of the account as the shaykh regains control over his piety, atones for his misdeeds, and reassumes the position of spiritual leader as guide and teacher to the Christian girl. As she converts to Islam and learns the path her heart ceases to abide among "the dust" of this material world and upon her death, her soul unites with the Truth she longed for.

With the tragic love story of the pious shaykh and the Christian girl, Attar obfuscates the boundaries between the nomian, or acceptable contours of religious fervor, and behavior that crosses into antinomian terrain, yet the narrative is clearly placed in a theologically idealized framework,

that is worth unpacking. The first observation that deserves attention is the passive and active aspects of the emotional journey between the shaykh and the girl. Symbolically the interplay between these two actors can be conceptualized as a battle between the forces of light and darkness, the Christian girl representing the latter as she seductively draws the shaykh away from his religious center into a hostile domain of another religion, in this case Christianity. The shaykh is held up as a formidable representative of religious devotion and therefore as an agent of light whose entire being becomes seized by the anarchy of love. Metaphorically, light becomes overpowered by the darkness of alluring matter which threatens to unravel the order of the entire universe drawing down with itself not merely the shaykh, but also Islam, to which he dedicated his life, religious devotion, and cultivation of students and followers.

This ostensibly common story of unrequited love conceals a more fundamental warning against religious heterodoxy that can arise from adulterated and ill-directed emotional attachment. This notion is further supported by the entrance of the Prophet into the narrative just as the shaykh's torments reach their crescendo. As an agent of salvation, the Prophet elevates the emotional battle of the shaykh to a cosmic level as an apocalyptic struggle between light and darkness, the true faith (Islam) against the false one (Christianity). The bodily passions of the shaykh are raised to a greater metaphysical level where love is understood in religious terms as a potent force that purifies and transmutes crude matter into pure spiritual truth. Love becomes a catalyst that refines and deepens the shaykh's religious attachment and brings him in direct and intimate contact with God through the agency of the Prophet. At the same time, his emotions cause a seismic transformation in the Christian girl, who, purified and refined as a convert to Islam, gets reabsorbed into transcendental light upon her death, thereby affirming the elemental truth of the faith.

Attar presents love, and its primal element of fire, as the most potent universal agent to dissolve boundaries between opposites, in this case the Christian female and the Muslim male, transmute their basic nature, and produce a new stasis of reabsorption into, and union with, perfect truth. This idea is further reinforced by another Sufi source worth citing here, which poignantly explains that as love becomes more refined, the differentiation and separation between subject and object, the active and the passive, progressively dissipates, giving way to boundless oneness:

> Then [the relationship between the lover and the beloved in] that unison (*ittihad*) is of various kinds: At times, she becomes the sword, while he becomes the sheath, and at times [the relationship is changed] the other way around. At one time [in the most perfect stage of love] when all difference has disappeared no judgment can be made concerning that [relationship, so that one cannot say who is the sword and who is the sheath].[54]

Conclusion

Through a close examination of mystical sources in Judaism, Christianity, and Sufism, this chapter has shown that mystical writers frequently deployed emotions as particularly effective rhetorical tools for the mediation of theological ideals and principles. The aim of this chapter was less to pinpoint the origins of these ideas in a particular religious tradition, rather the goal was to highlight points of convergence in the mystical writings of the three Abrahamic religions. Emotions such as love transcend the particular boundaries of discrete religious traditions and as such constitute particularly apposite resources for examining commonalities of belief rather than focusing on divergent doctrinal tenets and histories. As the above analysis has demonstrated, love was widely regarded by Jewish, Christian, and Muslim mystics as a powerful energy that when properly directed could elevate a person's soul to receive God and at the same time invite the Divine to be embraced by the ascending soul. That the God of the Abrahamic religions is a relational being is a fundamental assumption that underwrites the sources we have surveyed. Therefore, mystical encounters demand human participation in all its totality, the physical and the spiritual, to unite in the quest to call unto God and be received.

Mystical writers resonate the notion articulated by William James that love is not just a fleeting state but constitutes a primary question of being. As a gateway to intimacy with the divine, love, desire, and longing cannot be regulated, forced, or contrived, but arise as gifts that are bestowed and given by grace: in the words of William James, "our gift to the world, just so are the passions themselves gifts.—Gifts to us, from sources sometimes low and sometimes high; but almost always non-logical and beyond our control.... Gifts either of the flesh or of the spirit; and the spirit bloweth, where it listeth; and the world's materials lend their surface passively to all the gifts alike."[55]

Notes

1. Christof Rapp, "Emotions in Aristotle's Rhetoric" (Draft Paper, Academia.edu), 2.
2. John Deigh, "Concepts of Emotions in Modern Philosophy and Psychology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Emotions*, ed. Peter Goldie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 21.
3. Deigh, "Concepts," 22.
4. Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*: *Theory and Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
5. See James Hillman, *Emotion*: *A Comprehensive Phenomenology of Theories and Their Meanings for Therapy* (London: Routledge, 2001), 66–81. William James's formulation is particularly expressive: "The passion of love is the most familiar and extreme example of this fact. If it comes, it comes; if it does not come, no process of reasoning can force it. Yet it transforms the value of the creature loved as utterly as the sunrise transforms Mont Blanc." William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1902), 150.
6. Fiona Somerset, "Emotion," In *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. Amy Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 296.
7. See Somerset, "Emotion," 303.
8. Somerset, "Emotion," 297.
9. The approach of Martha C. Nussbaum denotes a counterpoint to this argument, interpreting emotions in general and love specifically as more stoic, cognitive, and discerning dimensions of the human being rather than merely constituting uncontrollable and instinctive forces. See Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*: *Theory and Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); *Upheavals of Thought*: *The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); *Love's Knowledge*: *Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
10. James Hillman, *Emotion*: *A Comprehensive Phenomenology of Theories and Their Meanings for Therapy* (London: Routledge, 2001), 79.
11. Werner G. Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 16–17.
12. Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros: The Christian Idea of Love*, trans. Philip S. Watson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
13. Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 532–48. For a comprehensive treatment of love within the Christian tradition, see Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love*. According to Jeanrond, Nygren follows the Augustinian theological path that sharply demarcates between spiritual love, *agape*, that is purified of any

admixture of desires of the flesh and *eros*, which is "self-centered and possessive." *A Theology of Love*, 16.

14. A number of Christian thinkers expressed their objection to Nygren's model including Paul Tillich, who stated: "If *eros* and *agape* cannot be united, *agape* towards God is impossible." See Paul Tillich, *The History of Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968), 312.
15. Elliot R. Wolfson, "The Body in the Text: A Kabbalistic Theory of Embodiment," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 95, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 481.
16. R. Isaac Hacohen, "Ma'amar (teshuvah) al ha'atzilut hasmalit," in *The Kabbalah of Rabbi Yaakov and Rabbi Isaac the Sons of Rabbi Yaakov Hacohen*, ed. Gershom Scholem (*Mada'ey haYahadut* 2, Jerusalem: Hamadpis, 1927), 84.
17. For an important recent monograph on this Kabbalist, see Bracha Sack, *Solomon Had a Vineyard: God, the Torah, and Israel in R. Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz's Writings* (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University Press, 2018).
18. Alkabetz, *Ayelet Ahavim* (*The Doe of Love*), fol. 7a. Cited in Sack, *Solomon Had a Vineyard*, 149–150.
19. In this article to facilitate easier access, I will use the English translation of the text by Simhah H. Benyosef, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Unabridged Translation of the Gate of Love from Rabbi Eliahu de Vidas' Reshit Chochmah* (Hoboken: Ktav, 2001).
20. 1 Samuel 20:21.
21. *Reshit Hokhmah*, 38.
22. On the concept of kissing in de Vidas see the recent article of Adam Afterman, "As in Water Face Reflects Face: *Mystical Union in Sefer Reshit Chochman*," *Daat* 84 (2017): 155–182, especially 163–165.
23. See Zohar Cited in Afterman, "As in Water," 173.
24. Deuteronomy 34:5.
25. Afterman, "As in Water," 164.
26. Adam Afterman, *"And They Shall be One Flesh:" On the Language of Mystical Union in Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 117.
27. *Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer*, 2.
28. Talmud Bavli *Chagigah* 2:2. On the erotic aspects of kissing in the Zohar, see Yehudah Liebes, "Zohar and Eros," *Alpayyim*, 9 (1994): 67–119. See also Michael Fishbane, *The Kiss of God: Mystical and Spiritual Death in Judaism* (Seattle: Washington University Press, 1994). On the social aspects of kissing see Joel Hecker, "The Kissing Kabbalists: Hierarchy, Reciprocity, Equality," *Studies in Jewish Civilization* 18 (2008): 171–208.
29. *Reshit Hokhmah*, 39.
30. *Reshit Hokhmah*, 39.
31. *Reshit Hokhmah*, 40.
32. *Reshit Hokhmah*, 40–41.

33. Lorelle D. Lamascus, *The Poverty of Eros in Plato's Symposium* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 44.
34. Marsilio Ficino, *On the Nature of Love*: *Ficino on Plato's Symposium*, trans. Arthur Farndell (London: Shepheard-Walwyn, 2016), 141–145.
35. Ficino, *On the Nature of Love*, 141. In a subsequent passage, Ficino likens love to an infectious disease, like the plague, but with far worse outcomes.
36. Patricia Dailey, *Promised Bodies*: *Time, Language, and Corporeality in Medieval Women's Mystical Texts* (New York: Columbia UP, 2013), 129.
37. Dailey, *Promised Bodies*, 155.
38. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, trans. John Dalton (London: Aeterna Press, 2015), 122.
39. Richard Kearney, "The Shulammite's Song: Divine Eros, Ascending and Descending," in *Toward a Theology of Eros*: *Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of Discipline,* ed. Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham UP, 2006), 332.
40. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, 81.
41. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, 81.
42. Richard Kearney, "The Shulammite's Song: Divine Eros, Ascending and Descending," 313, 336.
43. Cited in Saeed Zarrabi-Zadeh. *Practical Mysticism in Islam and Christianity*: *A Comparative Study of Jalal al-Din Rumi and Meister Eckhart* (London: Routledge, 2016).
44. *Mathnawi* III: 492.
45. *Mathnawi* III: 4445–7 and M III:4394.
46. Zarrabi-Zadeh, *Practical Mysticism*, 210.
47. *Mathnawi* III:22–4 and 29–30 cited in Zarrabi-Zadeh, *Practical Mysticism*, 214.
48. *Mathnawi* III:22–4 and 29–30 cited in Zarrabi-Zadeh, *Practical Mysticism*, 214–15. Specific quote is from Mathnawi V:2726.
49. William C. Chittick, *Divine Love*: *Islamic Literature and the Path to God* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2013), 322–323.
50. Pieter Coppens, Sufi Qur'an Commentaries: Crossings Between This World and the Otherworld (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 149–150. For a defining work on Maybudi, see Annabel Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics*: *The Qur'an Commentary of Rashid al-Din Maybudi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
51. In this article the following edition was used, Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. Sholeh Wolpé (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2017).
52. On al-Hallaj see Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); and Herbert W. Mason, *Al-Hallaj* (Oxford: Routledge, 1995).

53. Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, 88.
54. Ahmed Ghazzali. *Sawanih: Inspirations from the World of Pure Spirits*, trans. Nasrolla Pourjavady (London: Kegan Paul International and Iran University Press, 1986), 46.
55. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 151.

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CHAPTER 3

Rabbi Salim Shabazi and Sufism: Synthesis or Juxtaposition?

Mark Wagner

In my 2005 dissertation and in my 2008 book, *Like Joseph in Beauty: Yemeni Vernacular Poetry and Arab–Jewish Symbiosis*,[1] I sought to explain the dependence of the poetry of Rabbi Salim Shabazi (1619–c. 1679) upon its Arabic Yemeni *milieu*. In this work, I pointed to the *ḥumaynī* (semi-dialectical strophic) poetry of Sufis from Lower Yemen, the same region where Shabazi lived and worked. In it I made some observations on the basis of a comparison of verses from the facsimile edition of Shabazi's autograph manuscript (*Shirim ḥadashim le-rabi shalem shabazī*) with verses from the *dīwān* (collected poetry) of the roughly contemporary Sufi poet ʿUmar ibn ʿAbdallah Ba Makhrama (1479–1546/47), a copy of which I had acquired at the Ahhqaf Library in Tarim in 2000.

Here I throw a wider net, including works earlier than Ba Makhrama and also later Lower Yemeni Sufi poetry collections that were published at the time I wrote my dissertation, those published since that time, a manuscript source, the *dīwān* of ʿAbd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad al-ʿAlawi (1401/2–1482),[2] and an important secondary source, Muhammad Ali

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Aziz's *Religion and Mysticism in Early Islam: Theology and Sufism in Yemen*,[3] which is based on the author's doctoral dissertation on the Yemeni Sufi Ahmad ibn ʿAlwan (*circa* 1203–1266).

Some preliminary observations as to the scope and engagement of this prolific Jewish writer with Islamic intellectual traditions in general, and Sufism in particular, will be outlined here. I will suggest Sufi poetic influence on the language of Shabazi's poetry and, more specifically, the influence of the idiosyncratic style of Ibn ʿAlwan.

After his death, Rabbi Salim (also called Shalem or Shalom) Shabazi became a central figure in the religious rituals, musical traditions, intellectual life, and folklore of Yemeni Jews. Within these folktales, in which he serves as the protagonist, a central strand revolves around his magical powers. Some specifically deal with a chronologically impossible rivalry with Ibn ʿAlwan over which man possessed superior control of supernatural forces. In the 1930s (Zaydi Shiite) Imam Ahmad (1891–1962) had both Ibn ʿAlawn's tomb-mosque complex in Yifrus and Shabazi's tomb in nearby Taiz demolished. Both were pilgrimage sites (Shabazi's for both Jews and Muslims).[4] Both saints' cults revolved around the acquisition and ingestion of holy water from springs attached to their graves.

Arabic and Islam in Salim Shabazi's Poetic Corpus

Shabazi wrote a number of prose works. These are: (1) *Midrash Hemdat Yamim* (The Desired of Days), a Kabbalistic commentary in Hebrew on the Pentateuch;[5] (2) *Sefer Ha-Margalit* (The Book of the Pearl), a work that interweaves folk medicine with magical healing and the writing of amulets, mainly written in Hebrew;[6] (3) *Kitab al-raml* (The Book of Sand), a work of geomancy;[7] and (4) *Kitab al-zij* (The Book of the Astronomical Table).[8] Aside from the first work, these have not been studied. Suffice to say for our purposes, a significant portion of these works deal with occult subjects.

Shabazi also wrote some 700 poems of varying length. Some were entirely in Arabic (in Hebrew characters), others entirely in Hebrew. However, the majority used alternating stanzas of Hebrew and Arabic. A small number included Aramaic as well. Manuscript copies of the Yemeni Jewish *Dīwān*, an anthology consisting mainly of poems by Shabazi, can be found in libraries around the world. Nevertheless, a critical edition of Shabazi's poetry remains a desideratum.[9] In writing this preliminary study, I made use of the following three sources for Shabazi's poetry: (1) Shalom

Serri and Yosef Tobi *Shirim hadashim le-rabi Shalem Shabazi* (New Poems by Rabbi Shalem Shabazi),[10] a facsimile of two manuscripts that the editors say may be autograph copies of the author himself; (2) Shalom Serri and Yosef Tobi, *Diwan Amalel Shir*: *Mivhar Shirei teman* (*Dīwān* "I Will Sing a Song:" Selected [Poems] of the Poems of Yemen),[11] a printed *dīwān* meant for paraliturgical use by Yemenite Jews, who reside mainly in Israel; 3) Ratson Halevi, *Shirat yisrael be-teman* (The Poetry of Israel in Yemen),[12] a printed edition based on the author's private collection of *dīwān* manuscripts.

While a reliable text for Shabazi's poetry remains unavailable, several scholars have discussed the extent to which his poetry draws from an Arabic-Islamic milieu. Already in 1910, the Hungarian Hebraist and Persianist Wilhelm Bacher remarked of Shabazi's poetry, "in Jewish literature and perhaps in all of world literature one will search in vain… for two entirely different languages like Hebrew and Arabic being used as media of poetic expression with equal rights." He further stated that "Shabazian bilingualism (*Doppelsprachlichkeit*) shows that Jewish and Arabic were intimately connected in the cultural life of South Arabian Jews."[13]

More than a century later, research discoveries allow the scope of Jewish multilingual poetry to be expanded. For example, the *maṭrūz* (embroidered) poems of Moroccan Jews, while much shorter than Shabazi's odes, use both Hebrew and Arabic.[14] The Sabbatean hymns studied by Hadar Feldman Samet use Ottoman Turkish (which itself contains Arabic and Persian vocabulary), Judeo-Spanish, and Hebrew.[15]

Arabic dialectologist Moshe Piamenta narrowed the focus of the question of Arabic-Islamic influence on Shabazi's poetry significantly by proposing a strong thematic connection between Yemeni Jewish and (Yemeni Muslim) *ḥumaynī* poetry. *Ḥumaynī* poetry was a semi-dialectical Arabic lyric form that arose in Yemen in the thirteenth or fourteenth century and flourished until the late nineteenth century. He wrote:

> There is no doubt in my mind that R. Shalem Shabazī… and the Jewish poets of Yemen borrowed the colloquial *ḥumaynī* poetry of its period and were influenced by it in their choice of similes, metaphors and metonymies, though theirs was sacred poetry. They learned to weave the language of colloquial Yemeni poetry and its figurative symbols into topics [ranging from] the people of Israel, its God, religion, messiah, aspirations and duties, to the building of the holy Temple and the return to Zion.[16]

In 1989, Iraqi–Jewish scholar of Arabic literature David Semah tackled the corpus of Shabazi's strophic poetry and concluded that "[Muslim influence] is possible, but it is important to remember that the Arabic portions are influenced by Jewish religious ideas."[17] While other scholars of Jewish literature dismissed the possibility of non-Jewish influence on Shabazi, Semah's caveat here is worth careful consideration, as he had no discernible motive to minimize the influence of Arabic-Islamic concepts or language.

Sufism and Sufi Poets in Lower Yemen

There is no clear distinction between (ordinary) Sufis and Sufi poets. The latter had no special certification process. Some Sufis wrote poetry alone, some wrote prose and poetry, some wrote prose alone, and the majority probably wrote nothing. Some, like Ibn al-ʿArabi (1165–1240), wrote a great deal of poetry but are known primarily for their prose. Others, like ʿUmar ibn al-Farid (1181–1234), are known solely for their poetry. Moreover, Sufis' *shaṭḥiyāt* (ecstatic utterances) might resemble poetry in their rhythmic or rhymed quality without necessarily representing Arabic poetry in its generic sense.[18]

In his 1966 SOAS dissertation, J. A. Dafari laid out the "canon" of Sufi strophic poetry composed in the Shafiʿi regions of Lower Yemen (Hadramawt, Aden, the Tihama, and the region around Taiz and Ibb). Dafari offered a sensible account of the diffusion of this poetry as well. Sufis like Ibn al-ʿArabi adopted the strophic poetry of al-Andalus (*muwashshaḥ* and *zajal*) soon after their creation. (It must be noted that the Romance *kharjas* that have been a central focus of the study of this genre of poetry were abandoned by these later writers.) From al-Andalus the form migrated to Egypt and the Maghreb in the work of Shuʿayb ibn Abi Madyan al-Tilimsani (Algeria, Syria) (1126–1194), Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili (Morocco, Egypt) (1196–1258), and Abu al-Hasan al-Shushtari (Spain) (1212–1276), who was Abu Madyan's disciple. Dafari notes that both al-Shadhili and Abi Madyan al-Tilimsani had followers in Yemen.[19]

In Yemen itself, Sufi writers of *ḥumaynī* poetry include Ibn ʿAlwan, who Dafari reckons to have been one of the very earliest writers of *ḥumaynī* poetry;[20] ʿAbd al-Rahim ibn ʿAli al-Burʿi (d. 1400/01); ʿAbd al-Rahman ibn Ibrahim al-ʿAlawi (d. 1465/66); Abu Bakr ibn ʻAbdallah al-ʿAydarus (d. 1508/09); "al-Hadi" Muḥammad ibn ʿAli al-Sudi (d. 1525/26); Ba Makhrama; Hatim ibn Ahmad al-Ahdal (d. 1604/05); ʿAbdallah ibn

ʿAlawi al-Haddad (d. 1719/20); and ʿAbd al-Rahman b. Mustafa al-ʿAydarus (d. 1778).[21]

What Is Sufi in Sufi Poetry?

Whether or not a given poem is "Sufi" in its style, reception, or both is a matter that is not at all clear-cut. Many of Abu Nuwas' (756–814) wine poems (*khamriyyāt*) depict wine in numinous, spiritual language, and Sufi descriptions of wine, such as those in Ibn al-Farid's famous poem, do not differ significantly from the (courtly or "secular") Abu Nuwas in this regard. The *Kitab al-samaʿ wa-l-wajd* (Book on Listening to Music and [entering] an Ecstatic State) in al-Ghazali's (1058–1111) *Ihya ʿulum al-din* (Revivification of the Religious Sciences) is full of anecdotes of Sufis overhearing "ordinary" popular love songs and attributing a mystical meaning to them. In this context, the Sufism in poetry rests entirely with an individual or interpretive community engaged in what they might consider anamnesis in the Platonic sense—remembering truths that a previous incarnation of the soul knew but that had been lost in the transition to their current life. A given poem may or may not hint at its own status as a secret waiting to be divulged.

In terms of the hermeneutics of Sufi poetry, basic matters of interpretation are similarly obscure. For example, if the beautiful beloved of the love poem represents God, what do the specific descriptors (of hair, eyebrow, eyes, for example) signify? Where is the key to the hermeneutic puzzle? Later commentators on Shabazi's poetry created a fascinating exegetical corpus that used the teeming symbolic language of the Kabbalistic tradition, which included a Primordial Being constructed from the components of the sephirotic emanatory system, to explain such bodily metaphors. However, it would be rash to conclude that the Jews in Lower Yemen who adopted poetic content from Muslim Sufis understood the material in the same manner as the later commentators.

Shared *Ghazal* Motifs

The following description includes motifs and moods of Arabic love poetry that also dominate Sufi poetry: the beloved (it is unclear and/or unimportant whether this is a male or a female) is beautiful; the lover and the beloved meet in a garden setting where birds sing; the mood is a

melancholy one, and the lover may burst into tears; the beloved, in contrast, is either aloof and cruel or generous and pleasant.

Sufi poetry also draws from the language of Arabic wine poetry. The wine is precious and ancient. It is as if it is a living being. Drunkenness can reveal the true nature of the world. Sufi poetry uses the language of Arabic Neoplatonism: the world we live in is the fatally flawed result of a number of emanations from a supernal world or reality; use of the language of asceticism and homilies. The body is a cruel prison that prevents the soul from joining with its source. However, if one is forced to live in this world, one must observe God's precepts. Finally, Sufi poetry uses the language of anti-social (libertine) poetry (*mujūn*). The poetic "I" does not care what others think of his behavior. In fact, he courts reproach (Table 3.1).

In light of the fact that such images come from the wider corpus of Arabic *ghazal* poetry, rather than Sufi poetry specifically, we are faced with a conundrum: the fact that Sufi poetry represents an amalgam of other genres of Arabic poetry and literature (lyric, wine, Neoplatonism, asceticism, and libertinism) and the fact that the Jewish poet Shabazi also uses these materials does not prove that the Sufi poets (of Yemen or elsewhere) influenced Shabazi. However, it demonstrates that his work was influenced by Arabic poetry in a manner quite independent of the Arabic influence on the great Hebrew poets of Spain like Shmuel Ha-Nagid (993–1056), Judah Halevi (1075–1141), Moses ibn Ezra (1060–1138), and Shlomo ibn Gabirol (1021–1070), if only due to the fact that Shabazi was using the Arabic, rather than the Hebrew, language.

Shabazi Within the Lower Yemeni Sufi Milieu

While maintaining a healthy skepticism, there are, however, specific parallels between Shabazi's poetry and the poetic output of Sufis from Lower Yemen that are so specific that they cannot be coincidental. "Lightning" (*barq* or *burayq*) is a relatively common motif in both the Muslim and Jewish corpora in question.[54] However, in the following image, used by Shabazi, al-Shushtari, al-ʿAlawi, al-Sudi, and al-ʿAydarus, the motif is made more specific: "A little lightning bolt of protection" (*barq* or *burayq al-ḥimā*).[55] Shabazi, Ibn al-ʿArabi, al-Shushtari, and Ibn ʿAlwan write "Alif—I arranged [my melody or poem]" (*alif alaft*).[56] Both Ibn ʿAlwan and Shabazi mention a "partridge" (colloquial: *ṭāʾir al-jawn*);[57] Shabazi, Ibn ʿAlwan, and al-Sudi refer to a "luminous being" (Persian: *rawshān*).[58] Shabazi, al-Sudi, al-ʿAlawi, and al-ʿAydarus speak of a "long-necked

Table 3.1 *Ghazal* motifs in Shabazi's poetry

English	*Arabic*
Generous of fingers	*samiḥ al-banān*[22]
Generous of palms	*samīḥ al-kaff*[23]
The prettiest of virgins (literally "prettiest unbored pearls")	*zayn al-khurrad*[24]
A man so beautiful as not to need adornment	*sīd al-ghawānī*[25]
Prince of the doe-eyed (literally "having an intense contrast between the whites of the eyes and the pupils")	*amīr al-ḥūr*[26] *ḥūrī al-ʿīn*[27]
The green prince of the doe-eyed	*amīr al-ḥūr al-akhḍar*[28]
The doe-eyed of the garden	*ḥūr al-janān*[29]
The doe-eyed one among the gazelles	*hūrī al-ghizlān*[30]
Desert gazelle	*ẓaby al-barr*[31]
Branch of the *ban* tree	*ghuṣn al-bān*[32]
Bird on the *ban* tree	*ṭāʾir al-bān*[33] *qumrī al-bān*[34]
Verdant branch	*ghuṣn akhḍar*[35]
The Spring moon	*badr shaʿbān*[36]
Having hairlike darkness	*jaʿduh ka al-ẓalām*[37] *jaʿīduh ka al-ẓalām*[38] *al-jaʿīd al-muẓlamī*[39]
His face is as bright as the Moon	*manẓaruh ka al-badr al-aḥwar*[40]
A forehead like the crescent moon	*jabīnuh… ka al-hilāl* *jabīnuh ka al-badr tāma*[41]
Clear of cheeks	*ṣāfī al-khadd*[42] *khadduh al-ṣaqalī*[43]
Having a [bearded] appearance like myrtles	*manẓaruh shibh ʿūd al-hādisī*[44]
Tattooed spots on his/her cheeks	*naqshuh ʿalā khudūdih*[45]
Eyebrows like the [Arabic] letter *nūn*	*nūnī al-ḥawājib*[46]
His eyebrows are like bows… shooting [glances] at a young man like arrows	*ḥawājibuh nawāsiruh qawās… rāmiya li-l-fatā mithl suhām*[47]
O you of the glossy lips that resemble red agates in their luster	*yā bāhī al-shafāt tishbih ʿaqīq aḥmar zāhī bi-ṣaqlih*[48]
O you whose lips are like jewels and whose saliva is life-saving sugar	*yā man shafātak jawharānī wa-l-rīq sukkar yashfānī*[49]
Lips more beautiful than a string of pearls and corals	*tifūq shafātuh al-ʿaqd wa-l-marjān*[50]
Having beautiful lips	*ḥālī al-shafāt*[51]
The saliva of his mouth is mixed from fermented wine	*rīq thaghrih yimzaj min al-rawḥ yikhtamir*[52]
His neck is the neck of a she-gazelle	*ʿunquh ʿunq al-ghazālah*[53]

gazelle" (*ʿayṭalī* or *ʿawhajī*).[59] Al-Shushtari, Hatim al-Ahdal, al-Sudi, and Shabazi refer to the (Quranic) "Night of Power" (*laylat al-qadr*).[60] Al-Shushtari, Hatim al-Ahdal, and Shabazi mention "the Seven (Quranic) *Mathānī*" or "the Secret of the *Mathānī*."[61] Both al-Sudi and Shabazi refer to an episode associated with the hagiographical life of Muhammad (the *sīrah* literature), namely "the Opening of the Breast" (*sharḥ ṣadr*; *inshirāḥ ṣadrī*).[62]

In one case, Shabazi uses a poetic theme that is clearly (pre-)Islamic but has no parallel among the Sufi poets of Lower Yemen when he refers to "the knowledge of those who throw stones at birds [to prognosticate by means of their resulting flight paths]" (*ʿālim ka-zajr al-ṭayra*).[63]

More general thematic observations on the commonalities between Lower Yemeni Sufi poetry and that of Shabazi include an ecstatic-prophetic pose on the part of the poetic speaker: "On the day when my message and intent were delivered, I was Moses' boon companion. Though I had been an opponent, I was won over to prophecy" (*yawm ballagh raʾyī wa-qaṣdī kān mūsā lī naḍīm / bi-l-nubuwwa khaṣṣ ʿaḥdī baʿd mā kuntu ʿaḍī*wm).[64]

On the basis of Muhammad ʿAli ʿAziz's study of Ibn ʿAlwan, it can be tentatively concluded that Shabazi displayed elements of the "ʿAlwanian style" in his Arabic poetry. This style includes the frequent use of neologisms; words purporting to be Persian or other languages that are not actually Persian but seem to be a kind of "speaking in tongues;"[65] and the frequent mention of mythological birds like "Taha's peacock" (*ṭāwūs ṭāhā*), "Ahmad's peacock," or simply an enigmatic "nest" (*wakr*).[66] Compare Ibn ʿAlwan's putative use of mysterious foreign languages to Shabazi's: "One who is wise knows the science of allegory thoroughly, the Persian and Hindi languages are written on (by) his hand" (*li-man hū labīb ʿārif bi-ʿilm al-rumūz aṣlan / lughāt fārisī wa-hindī yakhuṭṭ al-khuṭūṭ bi-yadih*).[67] Shabazi also mentions a "green bird" (*ṭāʾir akhḍar*) as well as the *ʿayṭamūs*, which is presumably a bird of some kind, since it has a "nest" in one poem.[68]

Both Ibn ʿAlwan and his heirs and Shabazi are fond of using the image of Moses at Mount Sinai in their poetry, perhaps as an allusion to their own self-images as latter-day prophets.[69] Both Ibn ʿAlwan and his heirs and Shabazi are fond of describing a Paradisiac garden and the Celestial Hosts (cherubs and archangels).[70] Both Ibn ʿAlwan and Hatim al-Ahdal are fond of mentioning Mecca, which is often called *al-quds* or *al-bayt al-maqdis* in their poetry.[71] Due to the pre-existing ambiguity between Mecca and Jerusalem, it stands to reason that Shabazi saw in this mystical

language an allusion to the Jews' attachment to Jerusalem and the Temple. Ibn ʿAlwan and his heirs and Shabazi make reference to the magical powers of Arabic letters (ḥurufism), especially the letter *alif*.[72]

Conclusion

When Imam Ahmad ordered the tombs of the Muslim Ibn ʿAlwan and the Jew Shabazi destroyed, he made a strong argument of his own as to the fundamental commensurability of Lower Yemeni Sufism, with its cult of saints, and the oeuvre and tomb of the Kabbalist Rabbi Shabazi. Yet, what was the actual nature of the historical Shabazi's exposure to Sufism? The evidence outlined above renders untenable the position that Sufism did not influence Shabazi's poetry at all. However, the notion that Shabazi was well-versed in the literary sources of "the Islamic sciences" of his day seems far-fetched as well.

My admittedly speculative view is that Shabazi was something of a local Jewish wizard who was interested in many occult fields: Kabbalah, magic, geomancy, and astronomy. It is plausible that he and/or others around him saw him as a prophetic or even messianic figure in a context where the theological bar for eligibility for either of these roles was much lower than Jewish orthodoxy ordinarily allows.

In the course of his everyday life Shabazi heard the chants of Sufis from among the followers of Ibn ʿAlwan. Some of their themes—a tryst (or rebuffing) by a beautiful beloved in a garden setting, the heavenly hosts, Moses' theophany at Sinai, and so on—affirmed for him his pre-existing ontological assumptions. Conversely, Shabazi's involvement in the Sufi *samāʿ* (audition or concert) may have been much more active, the Jewish content having been, as it were, poured into a Sufi Islamic mold. Barring the discovery of new sources attesting to the interaction between Jews and Sufi Muslims in Lower Yemen, a definitive answer is impossible at this time.

In Israel, the putative "artlessness" of Shabazi's (Hebrew) poetry provided fodder for a polemical debate surrounding a recent documentary film.[73] Yet the notion of artlessness or seeming haphazardness captures an essential element of Shabazi's relationship to Arabic poetry. He seems completely unconcerned with the basic aesthetic assumptions of the genre, that is, the importance of meter and word-play (chiefly paronomasia and antithesis), as was Ibn ʿAlwan.[74]

Insofar as Ibn ʿAlwan's poetic utterances were labeled "revelations" (*futuḥāt*), and not poems, by his later followers, Shabazi's poetry might be

approached in a similar way. Thus, researchers are tasked with answering additional questions. What, if any, was the nature of Shabazi's involvement with Sufi Muslims? Did he attend their gatherings or was it enough for him, like the protagonists of many of al-Ghazali's anecdotes in the *Kitab al-samaʿ wa-l-wajd*, to merely overhear their songs?[75] Did his exposure to the Zohar or the messianic mission of Shabbetai Zevi (1626–1676) predate or postdate his interest in Sufism and other Islamic occult sciences? Most importantly, if his poetry represents, as I have argued here, the ecstatic utterances of a would-be prophet and/or savior, how did they overcome rabbinic sanction to become a quasi-sacred text for all of Yemeni Jewry, even those in Sanaa who would have seen (or came to see) his Lower Yemeni milieu as a forsaken backwater?

Notes

1. Mark Wagner, *Like Joseph in Beauty: Yemeni Vernacular Poetry and Arab–Jewish Symbiosis* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).
2. *Dīwān ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad al-ʿAlawī*, Leiden University Library, Or. 1248; Julien Dufour, "La *Safinah* de Colin: Une source importante de l'histoire de la poésie *ḥumaynī*," *Chroniques du manuscrit au Yémen* 15 (2013): 26, 29, 35, 36, 39.
3. Muhammad Ali Aziz, *Religion and Mysticism in Early Islam: Theology and Sufism in Yemen* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011).
4. Aharon Gaimani, "Visiting Graves of *ẓaddikim* in Yemen," *The Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 18 (2015): 292–294.
5. *Midrash Hemdat Yamim* (Jerusalem: Yoel Moshe Solomon Press, 1884/1885; republished several times).
6. Yosef Tobi, "Sefer ha-margalit: Ḥibur refuʾi no nudaʿ le-rabi Shalom Shabazī," *Briʾut ʿal boreiha* 1.5 (1988): 20–21. The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City holds the sole extant manuscript of this work.
7. In manuscript. See Hananya Goodman, "Geomancy Texts of Rabbi Shalom Shabazī," in *Judaeo-Yemenite Studies: Proceedings of the Second International Congress*, ed. Yosef Tobi and Efraim Isaac (Princeton and Haifa 1999), 33–40.
8. Yosef Tobi, "Shabazī, Shalom," in *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, ed. Norman Stillman (Leiden: Brill, 2010).
9. Professor Yosef Yuval Tobi is working on a critical edition.
10. Shalom Serri and Yosef Tobi *Shirim hadashim le-rabi Shalem Shabazi* (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1975).
11. Shalom Serri and Yosef Tobi, *Diwan Amalel Shir: Mivhar Shirei teman* (ʿAmutat eʿeleh be-tamar, 1988).

12. Ratson Halevi, *Shirat yisrael be-teman* (Kiryat Ono: Makhon Mishnat ha-Rambam, 1998).
13. Wilhelm Bacher, *Die hebräische und arabische Poesie der Juden Jemens* (Budapest: Adolf Alkalay and Son, 1910).
14. Yosef Chetrit, *Ha-Shirah ha-ʿaravit-yehudit she-bi-ktav bi-tzfon afrika—ʿiyunim poʾetiyim, leshoniyim, ve-tarbutiyim* (Jerusalem: Misgav Yerushalayim, 1994).
15. Hadar Feldman Samet, "The Hymns of the Sabbatian *Maʾaminim* in their Ottoman Cultural Context," (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2018, Hebrew).
16. Moshe Piamenta, "Mi-sdeh ha-yofi ha-enoshi, ha-elohi ve-ha-meshiḥi bi-shirat teman ha-ʿaravit," in *Orḥot Teman*: *Leshon, hisṭoriyah ve-ḥevrah, ḥikre sifrut*, ed. Shalom Gamliel, Mishael Maswari-Caspi, Shimʿon Avizemer (Jerusalem: Hotsʾat Makhon Shalom le-shivṭe Yeshurun, 1983/1984), 37. In his Arabic adaptation of this article, Piamenta wrote: "The Yemeni Jewish *muwashshaḥ*. . . was influenced in form and in content by Arabic poetry, especially *ḥumaynī* poetry…." "al-Jamāl al-ḥissī al-jismānī fī balāghati al-shiʿr al-yamanī al-ḥumaynī wa-l-yahūdī al-mutadarrij ilā al-ʿāmmiyyah (dirāsah lughawiyyah)," in *al-Karmil—Abḥāth fī al-lughah wa-l-adab* 18–19 (1997–1998): 95.
17. David Semah, "Limkorotav ha-tsuraniyim shel shir ha-ʿezor ha-temani," *Tarbitz* 58 (1989): 232.
18. See Carl W. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany: SUNY Press 1985), 143.
19. J.A. Dafari, "Ḥumaini Poetry in South Arabia" (PhD diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, 1966), 44–45; 199.
20. J.A. Dafari, "Ḥumaini Poetry in South Arabia," 44.
21. Mark Wagner, "Arabic Influence on Šabazian Poetry in Yemen," in *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 51 no. 1, (2006): 133–134; Julien Dufour, "La Safinah du Colin," 26–27; Julien Dufour, *Huit siècles de poésie chantée au Yémen*, Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2011, 207–208.
22. *Dīwān Amalel Shir*: *Mivḥar Shirei teman*, ed. Shalom Serri and Yosef Tobi (n.p.: ʿAmutat eʿeleh be-tamar, 1988) 133, 162; Ratson Halevi, *Shirat yisraʾel be-teman* (Kiryat Ono: Makhon Mishnat ha-Rambam, 1998), 1:209, 231, 244.
23. *Shirat yisraʾel*, 1:194.
24. *Amalel Shir*, 146.
25. *Amalel Shir*, 176.
26. *Amalel Shir*, 211; *Shirat yisraʾel*, 1:172.
27. *Shirat yisraʾel*, 1:242.
28. *Shirat yisraʾel*, 1:230.
29. *Amalel Shir*, 182.
30. *Shirat yisraʾel*, 1:220.

31. *Shirat yisraʾel*, 1:219.
32. *Shirat yisraʾel*, 1:214.
33. *Amalel Shir*, 199.
34. *Amalel Shir*, 226; *Shirat yisraʾel*, 1:217.
35. *Amalel Shir*, 183.
36. *Shirat yisraʾel*, 1:233.
37. *Amalel Shir*, 189.
38. *Ibid*., 175; *Shāʿir al-makhā ḥātim al-ahdal*, ed. Abd al-Raḥmān Tayyib Baʿkar (n.p.: al-Hayʾah al-ʿāmmah li-l-kitāb wa-l-nashr wa-l-tawzīʿ, 2005), 135; *Dīwān al-ʿAlawī* (Leiden MS Or. 1248): 6v, 23r, 97v, 107r.
39. *Shirat yisraʾel*, 1:251.
40. *Amalel Shir*, 239.
41. *Amalel Shir*, 198; Aḥmad b. ʿAlwān, *al-Futūḥ*: *Dīwān wa-kitāb*, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Sulṭān Tāhir al-Manṣūb (Beirut: Dār al-fikr al-muʿāṣir, 1995), 145, 189.
42. *Amalel Shir*, 176.
43. *Amalel Shir*, 202.
44. *Amalel Shir*, 179. The linguistic hybridity of Shabazī's poetry is not limited to the level of the strophe. Individual hemistiches may alternate between Hebrew and Arabic and Hebrew or Arabic words may appear in otherwise monolingual lines of verse: for example *al-jūf* ("the corporeal form"); *al-ward wa-l-nārdim* ("roses and spikenards"), *Amalel Shir* 189; *matā nazūr tziyon wa-l-awṭānī yawm tzahali wa-ǧīli* ("When I visit Zion and [my] homeland I will cry out with joy"), *Shirat yisraʾel*, 1:216.
45. *Amalel Shir*, 197.
46. *Amalel Shir*, 183; *Shirat yisraʾel*, 1:221.
47. *Shirat yisraʾel*, 1:252.
48. *Amalel Shir*, 203.
49. *Amalel Shir*, 178.
50. *Shirat yisraʾel*, 1:233.
51. *Amalel Shir*, 179.
52. *Amalel Shir*, 182; *Shirat yisraʾel*, 1:220.
53. *Amalel Shir*, 239.
54. For example, *Amalel Shir*, 189; *Shirat yisraʾel*, 1:211.
55. *Dīwān Abī al-ḥasan al-Shushtarī, Amīr shuʿarāʾ al-ṣufiya bi-l-maghrib wa-l-andalus 610 AH-668 AH*, ed., Muḥammad ʿAdlūnī Idrīsī and Saʿīd Abū al-Fuyūḍ (Casablanca: Dār al-thaqāfah, 2008), 44, 185; *Dīwān al-ʿAlawī*, 110; *al-ʿArif bi-llāh ʿabd al-hādī al-sūdī*: *shiʿruhu, rasāʾiluhu, manāqibuhu*, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Sulṭān Tāhir al-Manṣūb (Beirut: Dār al-fikr al-muʿāṣir, 1995), 107, 200, 257.
56. *Amalel Shir*, 196; Aḥmad b. ʿAlwān, *al-Futūḥ*, 170, 177; *al-ʿArif bi-llāh ʿabd al-hādī al-sūdī*, 139.
57. *Shirat yisraʾel*, 148; Aḥmad b. ʿAlwān, *al-Futūḥ*, 171, 173.

58. *Amalel Shir*, 176, 198; Aḥmad b. ʿAlwān, *al-Futūḥ*, 98, 162; *al-ʿArif bi-llāh ʿabd al-hādī al-sūdī*, 468.
59. *Amalel Shir*, 176, 182, 231; *Shirat yisraʾel*, 1:201, 204, 220, 229, 249, 251, 256; *Dīwān al-ʿAlawī*, 47r, 98v; *al-ʿArif bi-llāh ʿabd al-hādī al-sūdī*, 239.
60. *Shirat yisraʾel*, 1:170, 205; *Dīwān Abī al-ḥasan al-Shushtarī*, 131, 133, 136; *Shāʿir al-makhā ḥātim al-ahdal* 152, 188; *al-ʿArif bi-llāh ʿabd al-hādī al-sūdī* 139.
61. *Amalel Shir*, 143; *Shirat yisraʾel*, 1:141, 167, 209; *Dīwān Abī al-ḥasan al-shushtarī*, 80, 169; *Shāʿir al-makhā ḥātim al-ahdal*, 72, 98, 141; On the meaning of this enigmatic category see Uri Rubin, "Exegesis and Hadith: The Case of the Seven Mathani," G.R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef, *Approaches to the Qurʾān* (London: Routledge, 1993), 141–157.
62. *Shirat yisraʾel*, 141, 146; *al-ʿArif bi-llāh ʿabd al-hādī al-sūdī*, 410.
63. *Shirat yisraʾel*, 148.
64. *Amalel Shir*, 152.
65. *Amalel Shir*, 176; Aḥmad b. ʿAlwān, *al-Futūḥ*, 174; *al-ʿArif bi-llāh ʿabd al-hādī al-sūdī*, 305.
66. Aziz, *Religion and Mysticism in Early Islam*, 64–68.
67. *Amalel Shir*, 198.
68. *Amalel Shir*, 230, 202; *Shirat yisraʾel*, 1:205, 231, 244, 246, 248. In classical Arabic this word can mean a strong she-camel, a beautiful woman, an old or a sterile woman—as one of the "opposites" (*al-ʿaḍdād*).
69. *Dīwān Abī al-ḥasan al-shushtarī*, 125, 457; Aḥmad b. ʿAlwān, *al-Futūḥ*, 98, 109, 120, 121, 128, 143, 149, 152, 156, 166, 204; *Shāʿir al-makhā ḥātim al-ahdal* 116; *al-ʿArif bi-llāh ʿabd al-hādī al-sūdī*, 92, 131, 144.
70. Aḥmad b. ʿAlwān, *al-Futūḥ* 135, 144, 150, 196, 201, 217; *Shāʿir al-makhā ḥātim al-ahdal* 56, 89.
71. Aḥmad b. ʿAlwān, *al-Futūḥ* 127; *Shāʿir al-makhā ḥātim al-ahdal* 137, 144.
72. *Amalel Shir*, 207; *Shirat yisraʾel*, 1:204; Aḥmad b. ʿAlwān, *al-Futūḥ* 120, 122, 129, 152, 170, 173, 177, 190; *Shāʿir al-makhā ḥātim al-ahdal* 44, 145–6, 157, 192.
73. Ines Elias, "Rabi Shalom Shabazī lo mi she-ḥashavtem," *Haaretz* September 27, 2018.
74. I found only this pun (technically "complete paronomasia"—*jināṣ al-tāmm*) in one of Shabazī's poems: *bayn ahl al-ʿilm **asīr** / wa-anā maḥayyir ka al-**asīr*** ("I am as dazed as a prisoner as I travel among learned men") *Shirat yisraʾel*, 1:202.
75. See Duncan B. MacDonald, "Emotional Religion in Islām as Affected by Music and Singing," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (April, 1901): 195–252; (January, 1902): 1–28.

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CHAPTER 4

"And You Should Also Adjure in Arabic:" Islamic, Christian, and Jewish Formulas in the Solomonic Corpus

Gal Sofer

Throughout history, King Solomon has been a prime representative of the human-demonic power struggle. His magical power over demons has been known since antiquity, and stories about the books and formulas he wrote against the evil creatures were widely read in the ancient world.[1] Thus, it is not surprising that the figure of Solomon is found in some

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magical works, where he appears as the ultimate source—whether as a direct author or as the one who transmitted something.[2] The representation of King Solomon as a magician and a master of demons is definitely a transcultural motif, and makes the magical works that are attributed to him lean toward such transculturality. Readers were well aware of Solomon's power and magical tradition, so the cultural and social borders became blurred when engaging with a work attributed to the king. Occasionally, the transcultural nature of Solomonic works was expressed directly by the scribe. For instance, we can find an adjuration in an eighteenth-century Hebrew manuscript: "Afterwards, he should adjure them and say: 'If you are Christians—I adjure you by Jesus son of Mary and by the Gospels. If you are Israelites—I adjure you by Moses son of Amram and by the Torah. If you are Muslims—I adjure you by Muhammad son of Abdallah and by the Quran.'"[3] This adjuration, which was designed to call forth and control demons, which would then fulfill the magician's wishes, reflects the recognition and usage of foreign tradition to subdue and bind a power that is foreign in nature. It is not uncommon to see such adjuration in the Solomonic corpus, which heuristically we might describe as the collection of works that is attributed to King Solomon and focuses on practical means designed to summon and bind entities.[4]

We have personal testimonies of individuals who were aware of the mixed traditions in such practices, or at least of the multilingual sources. The Italian artist Benvenuto Cellini (1500–1571) recalled in his memoir a rite where he and his friends, accompanied by a necromancer, brought demonic entities into the Coliseum. During the rite, he explained, "The necromancer began to utter the most terrible invocations, and to call by their names many of the princes of the demoniac legions (speaking the while in Hebrew words, also in Greek and Latin),[5] and commanding them, by the strength and power of God incarnate, living, and eternal; so that in a brief space the whole Coliseum was full of them."[6] Another testimony, which Ariel Toaff mentioned, concerned a Belgian alchemist from Antwerp who read Abraham Colorni's Italian translation of the *Clavicula Salomonis* and criticized the work as being "full of errors, both in Hebrew and Chaldean terms, and in Arabic and Semitic terms."[7]

Jews were sometimes the source for such formulas, as we learn from the testimony of Domenico Temponi.[8] The combination of Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and Arabic is also attested explicitly in the *Tabula Semamphoras* (the Table of the Ineffable Name) in Berengarius Ganellus's *Summa Sacre Magice* (Compendium of Sacred Magic), where the Hebrew alphabet and the name of God (Eloy) appear alongside the Latin (Deus), Greek (Theos),

and Arabic (Allah) equivalents.[9] Owing to the transcultural nature of "Solomonic magic," multilingualism is one of the most dominant features of the works that I discuss in the pages that follow.

In the last decade, scholars have become increasingly interested in Solomonic magic. The discourse on the Solomonic works is constructed around a well-known text that bears Solomon's name in its title: the *Clavicula Salomonis* (The [Little] Key of Solomon), which is also known in Hebrew as *Mafte'ah Shelomoh* (Key of Solomon).[10] In this influential work, King Solomon explained to his son Rehoboam the way to control demons by various ceremonial acts.[11] The large number of versions of the *Clavicula Salomonis*, as well as the different languages in which it was written, evidence its transcultural nature as well as its popularity. The use of the pronoun "it" when referring to the *Clavicula* is misleading, since, as Federico Barbierato notes, from the seventeenth century the title *Clavicula* no longer referred to a specific work, but, owing to its great popularity, was used over and over in different texts.[12] Using a typological approach, Robert Mathiesen divided 122 manuscripts of the *Clavicula* into eleven groups.[13] Mathiesen suggests that the first *Clavicula* text was written in Greek and was known in fifteenth-century Italy under the title Υγρομαντεία (*Hygromanteia*). The consensus among scholars working in the Solomonic magic research field favors this hypothesis, which places the Greek text as the original source of the *Clavicula*, and many relevant studies fostering this theory have been published over the years.[14] Whereas Mathiesen's grouping includes works entitled "The Key of Solomon" as well as others that merely mention it (as the *kleidion*, little key, in late Greek versions), he does not refer to earlier texts of the Solomonic corpus, which might have a crucial part in the designing of the *Clavicula*. According to the favored hypothesis, the later Hebrew manuscripts of the work (those from the eighteenth century) are late translations of Italian or Latin works.[15]

In what follows, I shift the focus from the *Clavicula Salomonis* to other works that, in my opinion, play an important role in the Solomonic corpus. Those works, from an earlier stage of development of the corpus, attest much more complicated routes of knowledge transmission than those that have already been established, and better explain how different cultures influenced it. I argue that the common Christian and Judeo-Christian formulas from the later stages of the Solomonic corpus—as illustrated, for example, in Samuel Mathers's version of the *Clavicula* or the fifteenth-century Υγρομαντεία—are considered "mainstream" only when we ignore earlier Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic texts. More specifically, I

show that Western Christian adaptations of Solomonic works marginalized earlier Eastern (most probably Jewish Babylonian) sources. This chapter points out some of these examples, which demonstrate different approaches to the textual tradition, but the new historiography of the *Clavicula Salomonis* that those examples suggest is beyond the scope of this discussion and will be described elsewhere.

Hebrew, Arabic, and Aramaic in *Liber Bileth*

The Solomonic text that is at the center of our discussion is the Latin work known under the title *Liber Bileth* (Book of Bileth). As Jean Patrice Boudet suggests, this fifteenth-century text was probably written in de Medici's Florence.[16] Boudet, who published an edition of this text, argues that its origin is at least partly Arabic. The practice described was designed to summon and subdue Bileth, the King of Demons, and is purely Solomonic in the sense of ritual instruments and *modus operandi*. Accordingly, the *magister* should cleanse himself, draw a circle, write certain formulas on a piece of parchment, burn incense, and recite some adjurations. All those actions lead to the appearance of Bileth, who will obey the practitioner. While trying to summon the King of Demons, the *magister* uses Arabic demonological hierarchies, alongside Hebrew and Aramaic formulas.

In the eighteenth century we find a Hebrew translation of this text within the *Mafteah Shelomo*'s known manuscripts that preserves Arabic traditions. Thus, the Master of Art can adjure the demons by calling them: "And we will also quickly and powerfully call your chiefs, and your people, and your advisors who stand in front of you: Where is Shalqaram? Where is Fosiar?… Where is Shima? Where is Danei Davivy? Where is Sadar? Where is Asvuar? Where is Larvruq? Where are you, Marutah and Marut, the two youths who jumped every day to the stars in the sky?"[17] Marutah and Marut are the Quranic Harut and Marut, the two angels that taught people sorcery (Quran 2:102). Based on those two demonic figures, the interrogative manner in which they are adjured ("where are you?," the Latin "*Ubi est*?," or the Hebrew "Ayh?"), and on some lines of Hebrew transliteration from Arabic, Gershom Scholem argued that the Hebrew text had its origin in an Arabic version.[18] But Scholem had only two Hebrew versions of *Liber Bileth*—a late-eighteenth-century edition known as *Ḥotam Bileth* (The Seal of Bileth) and an earlier fifteenth-century work entitled *Maase Bilar* (The Work of Bilar), which includes a mix of Arabic and Hebrew formulas that reflect a late adaptation, and which Scholem

himself described as an incomplete.[19] Without the Latin text, Scholem could not know that the later Hebrew work was a translation of the fifteenth-century Latin *Liber Bileth*, which is important textual evidence for the transmission and adaptation of texts from the medieval (or late antique) world to the early modern Western one.[20] This evidence force us to examine neglected Eastern sources, in order to understand the later Western recensions. Such examination, as will be shown, not only can contribute to the historiography of the text itself, but also might shed light on its reception in different cultures, while revealing different kinds of editorial decisions.

As it is a translation of an earlier Aramaic and Hebrew work known as *Sefer Ha-Qyiẓah* (The Book of Gathering [Spirits]), the Latin *Liber Bileth* should be studied as a mediator between earlier Hebrew works and later ones.[21] In the *Qyiẓah* rite, the practitioner was instructed to draw a circle, prepare a silver seal, place four antlers inside the circle, write on a parchment, burn incense, and recite some adjurations. These actions were to call forth Bilar, who would obey the practitioner. Whereas the ceremonial acts in such works are somewhat stable, the verbal elements, that is, the adjurations and onomastics, are not.[22] The multilingualism and the unstable nature of the *nomina magica* in such texts often served as catalysts for a Christian acculturation. Such a process can be attested by the sixteenth-century volume *The Book of Soyga*,[23] which includes a long Latin version of *Sefer Ha-Qyiẓah*.

Hebrew Sefer Ha-Qyiẓah[24]	*Latin Liber Bileth*[25]	*Latin Book of Soyga*[26]
Haltomiel, Darmosiel, Yaho, Yahaviel, Ovdiahel… and by the ring of Oqiel, and by the ring of Ḥiqiel and by the ring of Metatron the great, a servant that named after his master and lord…. In the name of these explicit names… ʾBG YTṢ… ŠQWṢYT	Altiamel, Dethmusiel, Gieu, Ia… Ovadia… and by the ring Yuechiel and by the ring Dachiel and by the ring Dachanriel and by the ring Metattron, that is Saint Enoch, who is servant that has been called by the name of his master, holy master… by the name or in the name of the *explanatorum* names that have been written here: Anath, Cachag, Ora, Sinan, Negar, Ginas, Ptar, Cechag, Teva, Agu, Yupoc, Sco, Ceth	by the angel Vehiel and the angel Dachiel and by the angel Dachanuel and by the angel Metucaon, that is Saint Enoch, who is servant of God, that has been called by the name of his master, holy… in the name of the explanatorum names that have been written here: Agios, Caricos, Oceynomos, Sacerdos, Nomen, Santum, Gloria, Paraclitus, Trinitas, Alga, Redemptor, Karitas, Emanuel, Agnus, Giagia, Via, talon, Sanctus, Caritas, Cecinomos, Karitas

Whereas in the Hebrew versions the *magister* adjures by the name of 42 letters (ʾBG YTṢ etc.), the scribe of *The Book of Soyga* changed this name, in most cases keeping only the abbreviation of this already corrupted Latin form in *Liber Bileth*. The name ʾBG (אבג) in the original Hebrew version was copied as Anath[27] in the *Liber Bileth*, but the later scribe changed it to Agios (Ἅγιος), a much more popular name in the Solomonic corpus. This was also the case in regard to other names—some of them from Latin Christian origin: Paraclitus, Trinitas, Sacerdos, and so on. If we ignore the Hebrew origin, the Greek and Latin words might be considered as evidence of a Greek or Latin source. Hence, while studying the onomastics of such texts, one must remember that what they are seeing might be a late adaptation. In this case, the later source point to a Christian acculturation, suggesting that formulas of *Sefer Ha-Qyiẓah* already have been circulated among Christian scribes in the sixteenth century. The earlier Latin *Liber Bileth* lacks such Christian references and is closer to the Hebrew origin, and when taking into account the time and place of the creation of *Liber Bileth* (de Medici's Florence), one can speculate that it is a result of Jewish and Christian collaboration.

We have a few Cairo Genizah fragments of *Sefer Ha-Qyiẓah* in Aramaic and Hebrew, dated as early as the eleventh century. The Latin *Liber Bileth* is nearly a complete translation of this medieval work, which was probably quite popular in the fifteenth century. For example, some of the *Qyiẓah*'s formulas were used by the author of the allegedly Greek origin of the *Clavicula Salomonis* text. Some of the formulas for the central rite of the *Hygromanteia* derive from *Sefer Ha-Qyiẓah* with some predictable additions from Greek works, such as the *Testament of Solomon*. The redactor of the earliest extant *Hygromanteia* manuscript, which is dated to the fifteenth century, added a copy of the *Testament of Solomon* to his manuscript.[28]

The Arabic formulas in *Sefer Ha-Qyiẓah*, which are primarily long lists of demonic figures from Arabic sources, appear as early as in fragments that date to the twelfth century. There is evidence that such lists existed in Aramaic in an earlier source and that the Arabic list was incorporated at a later stage. For example, the Latin *Liber Bileth* includes the following adjuration: "Ubi est Scalcaram? Ubi est Rosuar… Ubi est [*sic*!] Laave et Leeva qui voquatus [*sic*][29] est flamma? Ubi est Es et Sata qui vocatur ignis?… Ubi est Aaruth et Maruth, duo juvenes qui cotidie usque ad castra celorum [*sic*][30] prosiliunt?" That is: Where is Scalcaram? Where is Rosuar?… Where is Laave and Leeva that has been called flame? Where is

Es and Sata that is called fire?… Where is Aaruth and Maruth, the two youths who jump up to the camps of heavens every day?[31]

Laave and Leeva refer to *Leava* (להבה), the Hebrew word for flame. Es and Sata are probably Ishata (אישתא)—the Aramaic word for fire.[32] Eshata (אשתא), as a demonic figure causing fever, is mentioned without the Arabic figures in an eleventh-century fragment of *Sefer Ha-Qyiẓah* in a list of demonic creatures, alongside Aravita (ערויתא), which means shivering.[33] Moreover, it should be noted that the Arabic figures are not the only non-Hebrew characters in this kind of adjuration, and in a different fragment of *Sefer Ha-Qyiẓah* we also find: "And where are the kings of Edom? King Ritano their chief, and King Donato, and King Bortano, and King Gzriato, and King Mglto, and King Adirno and where is King Aglico?"[34] As their names suggest, these kings most probably have Latin or Greek origins, which accounts for the mention of Edom—the ancient kingdom that has been associated with Rome since the second century.[35] It is hard to point to the precise moment when the Arabic sources were incorporated into the Hebrew and Aramaic texts, and it is also difficult to determine the exact direction of such transmission, especially as there has not been enough research concerning the Arabic traditions of the Solomonic corpus.[36] That being said, it is interesting to consider that sometimes such incorporations might have been attempts to bridge gaps in the textual traditions of the redactor, as in the case of one mysterious formula that mentions twelve demonic families or *cognationes*, that is, kindred.

Hebrew Sefer Ha-Qyiẓah[37]	*Latin Liber Bileth*[38]
If you wished to dominate over the demons and all the evil spirits of all the twelve families that came down from heaven at the day of their father Satan, study this whole book at first, and their names, and the names of their families and each and every species of them.	Therefore, if one wish to rule or to dominate over all winds and demons and all the twelve *kindred* that descended from heaven in the days of their fathers, he should first learn this book, and their qualities, and their *kindred* and all their kinds.

In order to adjure the twelve families, the practitioner had first to study and remember their names. This instruction was very common and appears in several Cairo Genizah fragments, the Latin *Liber Bileth*, and *The Book of Soyga*, which was in the hands of the famous magician John Dee. Unfortunately, although the practitioner was instructed to remember the names of the twelve families, exact versions of those twelve names were

not found in any source to which I had access. It is possible that Rabbi Yohanan Alemanno (1435–1504) encountered the same situation in which there was a gap in the textual tradition he received concerning the *Qyiẓah* rite and the identity of the twelve families, and therefore he decided to bridge this gap by using what he might considered as an appropriate source—one of the epistles of the Ikhwan al-Safa, the Brethren of Purity.

Rabbi Yohanan Alemanno and *Liber Bileth*

Yohanan Alemanno was a Renaissance humanist. Raised in the school of Rabbi Yheuda Messer Leon (1422–1498) in Padua, he learned not only medicine and philosophy, but also Kabbalah, and is known to have been Giovani Pico della Mirandola's Kabbalah teacher in de Medici's Florence.[39] I consider one of Alemanno's works that has not yet been studied systematically as an attempt to create an Encyclopedia of Magic and Kabbalah using Dante's *La divina Commedia* as a literary framework.[40] Alemanno described his journey to other worlds, accompanied by his mother, who played the role of Virgil. Hand in hand, the two walked through the infernal demonic world, which corresponded with Dante's Inferno; the world of souls, which paralleled the Purgatorio, and the upper divine world, which matched the Paradiso. On this journey Alemanno learned about magical works and Kabbalistic concepts from his mother (a personification of the Torah) and from demonic and angelic figures they met with in order for him to become a perfect prophet and a leader of the Jewish people.

In de Medici's Florence, Alemanno encountered at least five works in the Solomonic corpus, including the *Liber Iuratus Honorii*, the *Ars Notoria*, the *Liber Razielis*,[41] the *Ydea Salomonis*, and the *Liber Bileth* in its earlier Hebrew form. When he and his mother wandered in the Inferno, they talked about the ability to summon and control demons. In this context he noted that Bileth or Bilid was the contemporary King of Demons (after Shamurish, who was known from Arabic traditions). According to Alemanno, Bileth ruled the world with twelve families: "His troops are the sons of Ss'n and the sons of Bq'n. His Judges are the sons of 'Idris and the sons of Bl'qis. His supervisors are the sons of Pr'giṣ and the sons of In'bir. His advisors are the sons of Lb'r'n and the sons of H'mywn. His wise men

are the sons of Nbrywn and the sons of P'n'n. His whisperers are the sons of Lq'n and the sons of Bhrywm."[42] In what we might see as a unique approach, Alemanno collected the names of twelve demonic groups from one epistle of the Ikhwan al-Safa. Specifically, he took those names from the Kalonymos son of Kalonymos's Hebrew translation of *The Case of the Animals versus Man before the King of the Jinn*.[43]

This was not the only time that Alemanno made use of the Ikhwan's doctrines, and he cited them several times in his works, adopting their perception of King Solomon as a prophet and a political leader.[44] In this case, Alemanno used the epistle to bridge a serious gap in the *Sefer Ha-Qyiẓah* or *Liber Bileth* rite, and while this might be considered a unique approach concerning "foreign" knowledge, it should not be a surprise. We already saw how the scribe of *The Book of Soyga* interpreted unfamiliar *nomina magica* to fit them into a Christian form. Through different Solomonic works, one can often come across different editorial approaches. For example, as opposed to the Christian scribe, who intentionally or unconsciously made changes in the original text, a Hebrew scribe that understood that the demons that he was going to adjure were from the Arabic tradition, added an explicit and direct reference to an Arabic source:

> I adjure you the great demon Barkan… I adjure you, demon—male or female, one or many, angel or Satan… Jewish or Gentile…. And you should also adjure in Arabic language, in this way: I adjure you by the name of your wisdom and knowledge, which named al-Quran, and by the scriptures that your prophet, whose name is Muhammad, wrote to you: Te He Me Ye Shin Beif He'i Ayn Ẓa'it…. And where is Anani? And where is Maliq son of Aḥmadi?[45]

That scribe not only adjured Barkan with Jewish formulas, but also with what he considered "Arabic language," that is, Arabic formulas written in Hebrew. Thus, he referred to the Quran, Muhammad, and the mysterious Quranic letters known as the *muqaṭṭaʿāt*.[46]

We can also find a clear but indirect Christian reference in another adjuration that addressed Barkan, or Barakon. Inspired by the earlier *Sefer Ha-Qyiẓah*, this adjuration was preserved in late Hebrew manuscripts through a Christian mediating text, which might well have been on Reginald Scot's desk when he wrote his *Discovery of Witchcraft*.

Adjuration of Baraqon[47]	*Discovery of Witchcraft*[48]
I adjure you, the spirit that called Baraqon… By the power and truth of the merciful, true and living God, and by the angel that will say in the day of judgment, with trumpets voices: "Arise, all the men and women and dead," and he shall say: "Come, come, come to the right judgment in front of God, the Creator of all"	I conjure you three sisters of fairies… by the most mercifull and living God, that will command his angell to blowe the trumpe at the daie of judgment; and he shall saie, Come, come, come to judgment

All those examples of different kinds of redaction make it very difficult for us to fully understand and appreciate the transmission of the Solomonic texts. Nevertheless, we can do so by studying the sources that have hitherto been neglected in this field. This neglect is not due solely to the lack of scholarly work, but also to the scribes' methods of redaction. Only careful study of the Arabic sources can lead to a better understanding of the Solomonic tradition, as well as the Hebrew sources, which, as I have tried to show, reveal much more complex routes of knowledge transmission than those that have already been established.

Notes

1. In Flavius Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews*, an exorcist named Eleazar exorcised a demon by invoking the name of King Solomon and by reciting formulas written by the king. See Dennis C. Duling, "The Eleazar Miracle and Solomon's Magical Wisdom in Flavius Josephus's '*Antiquitates Judaicae*' 8.42–49," *The Harvard Theological Review* 78, no. 1/2 (1985): 1–25. Origen of Alexandria wrote in his commentary to the Gospel of Matthew that Solomon wrote adjurations against demons. See ibid, 16–17; Philip S. Alexander, "Incantations and Books of Magic," in *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (*175 B.C–135 A.D.*), ed. Emil Schürer, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Clark, 1986), 376; Gideon Bohak, "Exorcistic Psalms of David and Solomon," in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*: *More Noncanonical Scriptures*, ed. Richard Bauckham, James R. Davila, and Alexander Panayotov, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2013), 287. On the portrayals of King Solomon from antiquity onward, see Pablo A. Torijano, *Solomon, the Esoteric King*: *From King to Magus*: *Development of a Tradition*, Supplements to the *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, v. 73 (Leiden: Brill, 2002).
2. For example, the Greek work known as the *Hygromanteia*, or the Latin *Clavicula Salomonis*. See Torijano, *Solomon, the Esoteric King*, 151–175;

Jean-Patrice Boudet and Julien Véronèse, "Le Secret dans la magie rituelle médiévale," *Micrologus. Nature, Sciences and Medieval Societies*, 14 (2006): 101–50; Julien Véronèse, "La transmission groupée des textes de magie salomonienne de l'Antiquité au Moyen âge: bilan historiographique, inconnues et pistes de recherche," in *L'antiquité tardive dans les collections médiévales* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 2008), 193–223.

3. New York, Jewish Theological Seminary MS 9144, 20r. This manuscript is an anonymous collection of spells and remedies.
4. This should not by any means be considered a clear-cut definition. As Véronèse noted, there are problems with delineating the "Solomonic Magic" corpus, and there is doubt concerning its unity. See Véronèse, "La transmission groupée des textes de magie salomonienne," 199; id., "Solomonic Magic," in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. Sophie Page and Catherine Rider (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2019), 187–192. Even when there are attempts to refer to the "Solomonic Magic" as a corpus, it seems to be, as Karr admits: "By arbitrary and rather unscientific means." See Don Karr, *Sepher Raziel, Also Known as Liber Salomonis: A 1564 English Grimoire from Sloane MS 3826* (Singapore: Golden Hoard Press, 2010), 25. That seems to be the case in the "Solomonic Cycle" in Butler's work, where she listed *The Key of Solomon* alongside the *Grimorium Verum* and others. See E. M. Butler, *Ritual Magic*, Reissued (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 47–99.
5. In the Italian original: "in voci ebree, assai ancora greche e latine." See Benvenuto Cellini, *La vita di Benvenuto Cellini*, ed. Brunone Bianchi (Florence: Monnier, 1866), 138.
6. Benvenuto Cellini, *Memoirs of Benvenuto Cellini: A Florentine Artist*, trans. Anne Macdonell (London: Dent, 1910), 134.
7. My translation. See Ariel Toaff, *Il Prestigiatore di Dio: Avventure e Miracoli di un Alchimista Ebreo nelle Corti del Rinascimento* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2010), 185–186.
8. Ruth Martin, *Witchcraft and the Inquisition in Venice: 1550–1650* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 98.
9. Jan R. Veenstra, "Honorius and the Sigil of God: The Liber Iuratus in Berengario Ganell's Summa Sacre Magice," in *Invoking Angels: Theurgic Ideas and Practices, Thirteenth to Sixteenth Centuries*, The Magic in History Series (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 171.
10. On the eighteenth-century Hebrew *Mafte'ah Shelomoh*, see Claudia Rohrbacher-Sticker, "*Mafteah Shelomoh*: A New Acquisition of the British Library," *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 1993; *id*., "A Hebrew Manuscript of *Clavicula Salomonis*, Part II," *The British Library Journal* 21, no. 1 (1995): 128–36; Reimund Leicht, *Astrologumena Judaica: Untersuchungen*

Zur Geschichte Der Astrologischen Literatur Der Juden, Texts and Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism 21 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 342–357; Gal Sofer, "The Hebrew Manuscripts of *Mafte'ah Shelomoh* and an Inquiry into the Magic of the Sabbateans," *Kabbalah*: *Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 32 (2014): 135–174 [Hebrew].

11. As Boudet and Véronèse showed, the incipit that described Solomon teaching Rehoboam might be important for the dating of the *Clavicula*. See Boudet and Véronèse, "Le Secret dans la magie rituelle médiévale," 107–113.
12. Federico Barbierato, "Writing, Reading, Writing: Scribal Culture and Magical Texts in Early Modern Venice," *Italian Studies* 66, no. 2 (July 2011): 263–276.
13. Robert Mathiesen, "The Key of Solomon: Toward a Typology of the Manuscripts," *Societas Magica Newsletter* 17 (2007): 1–9.
14. For example, see Barbierato, "Writing, Reading, Writing," 266; Pablo A. Torijano, "The Hygromancy of Solomon," in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*: *More Noncanonical Scriptures*, ed. Richard Bauckham, James R. Davila, and Alexander Panayotov, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2013), 309; Owen Davies, *Grimoires*: *A History of Magic Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 15. Boudet and Véronèse contend that the Greek *Hygromanteia* and the Latin *Clavicula* share a lot of similarities. See *id*., "Le Secret Dans La Magie Rituelle Médiévale," 107.
15. There is some textual evidence that does not support the argument that the later Hebrew manuscripts are direct translations of Italian or Latin works. For example, the anonymous scribe of the Hebrew manuscript British Library Or. 14759 (hereafter: BL Or. 14759) admitted his lack of understanding concerning a specific Hebrew word, which he tried to explain by using a biblical reference (47r), and this is clear evidence of an earlier Hebrew source. Moreover, we have one folio of the Hebrew version of the *Clavicula*, which we can date back to the fifteenth century. Hopefully, a publication on that folio will be available soon.
16. Jean-Patrice Boudet, "La Magie au carrefour des cultures dans la Florence du quattrocento : le 'Liber Bileth' et sa démonologie," in *Penser avec les démons*: *démonologues et démonologies* (*XIIIe–XVIIe siècles*), ed. Martine Ostorero and Julien Véronèse, Micrologus' Library 71 (Florence: Sismel—Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2015), 313–344.
17. BL Or. 14759, 21r.
18. Gershom Scholem, "Bilar (Bilad, Bilid, ΒΕΛΙΑΡ), the King of the Demons," *Mada'ei ha-Yahadut* 1 (1926): 114 [Hebrew].
19. Scholem, "Bilar," 114.

20. Gal Sofer, "The Seal of Bileth: Its Position in the *Kevitza* Literature and the *Mafte'ah Shelomoh* Cycle" (Thesis, Ben-Gurion University, 2016), 65 [Hebrew].
21. *Sefer Ha-Qyiẓah* has not yet been thoroughly studied, although some Genizah fragments have already been published. See, for example, Peter Schäfer and Shaul Shaked, *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza*, vol. 2, Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 64 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 312–340. Gershom Scholem wrote about the fifteenth-century *Sefer Qyiẓat Ha-Ruḥot* (The Book of Gathering Spirits). See Gershom Scholem, "Some Sources of Jewish–Arabic Demonology," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 16, no. 1–2 (1965): 1–13. As far as I know, Gideon Bohak is the first and only scholar to write about *Sefer Ha-Qyiẓah* and its Babylonian context. I would like to thank him for allowing me to study his work through a draft that he sent me, which is now available: see Gideon Bohak, "Babylonian Jewish Magic in Late Antiquity: Beyond the Incantation Bowls," in *Studies in Honor of Shaul Shaked*, ed. Yohanan Friedmann and Etan Kohlberg (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2019), 70–122. I wish to express my gratitude to Professor Gideon Bohak for sharing with me a draft of this paper.
22. Boudet and Véronèse, "Le Secret dans la magie rituelle médiévale," 114 n. 35.
23. About *The Book of Soyga*, see Deborah E. Harkness, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels*: *Cabala, Alchemy, and the End of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 44–45. I am using Jane Kupin's edition of this work, available in Joseph Peterson's important online source "Esoteric Archive." See Jane Kupin, "Aldaraia Sive Soyga Vocor," Esoteric Archives, 2014, http://www.esotericarchives.com/soyga/Book_of_Soyga_8x10.pdf.
24. Cambridge T-S AS 142.15, 1v. This Genizah fragment was published by Peter Schäfer and Shaul Shaked in *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza*, vol. 3, Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 72 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 118–126. The translation into English is my own.
25. Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale II.III.214, 81v: "Altiamel, Dethmusiel, Gieu, Ia. . . Ovadia. . . et per annulum Yuechiel et per anulum Dachiel et per annulum Dachanriel et per annulum Metattron, id est sanctus Enoch, qui famulus per nomen magistri sui sanctus magister vocatus est. . . per nomen vel in nomine explanatorum nominum quae hic scripta sunt: Anath, Cachag, Ora, Sinan, Negar, Ginas, Ptar, Cechag, Teva, Agu, Yupoc, Sco, Ceth." Also, in Boudet, "*Liber Bileth*," 337–338.
26. 144v–145r, based on Kupin's Latin edition: "per angelum Vehiel et angelum Dachiel et per angelum Dachanuel et per angelum Metucaon i.e. sanctus Enoch qui famulus dei est per nomen magistri sui sanctus vicatus [*sic*]

est. . . in nomine explanatorum nominium [*sic*] quae hic scripta sunt: Agios, Caricos, Oceynomos, Sacerdos, Nomen, Santum, Gloria, Paraclitus, Trinitas, Alga, Redemptor, Karitas, Emanuel, Agnus, Giagia, Via, talon, Sanctus, Caritas, Cecinomos, Karitas." The translation to English is mine.

27. Anath can be read in the Latin manuscript as Avath, which better explains how the Hebrew letter *bet* (ב) was transliterated as *va* (pronounced as a soft *bet*).
28. British Library, Harley MS. 5596. See Chester Charlton McCown, *The Testament of Solomon* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1922), 13–15. As Bohak noted, some phrases in Harley MS. 5596 are transliterations of Hebrew. See Gideon Bohak, "Greek-Hebrew Linguistic Contacts in Late Antique and Medieval Magical Texts," in *The Jewish–Greek Tradition in Antiquity and the Byzantine Empire*: *A Festschrift for Nicholas de Lange*, ed. Jim Aitken and James Carleton-Paget (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 247–260.
29. *Sic*. Should be *vocatus*.
30. *Sic*. Should be *caelorum*.
31. Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale II.III.214, 82v. Also, in Boudet, "*Liber Bileth*," 340. The translation is my own.
32. *Esh* (אש) is also the Hebrew word for fire.
33. Cambridge, T.-S. NS 322.29, 1r. See Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza*, 2, 334–340. It is interesting to note that in "The Work of Bilar," Esh, Eshata/Ishata, Laav and Leava are mentioned as restraining powers, rather than as demonic ones. On the fire motif in the *Qyizah* rite, see Sofer, "The Seal of Bileth," 77–78.
34. Oxford MS heb e 44–79, 1r. For a short discussion on this fragment see Emma Abate, "Contrôler les démons: Formules magiques et rituelles dans la tradition juive entre les sources qumrâniennes et la Genizah," *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 230 (2013), 293–295.
35. Gerson D. Cohen, "Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought," in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 19–48.
36. Bernd-Christian Otto, "Magie im Islam: Eine diskursgeschichtliche Perspektive," in *Die Geheimnisse der oberen und der unteren Welt*: *Magie im Islam zwischen Glaube und Wissenschaft*, ed. Sebastian Günther and Dorothee Anna Maria Pielow, Islamic History and Civilization 158 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 531.
37. Cambridge, T-S K1.1, 1r. This fragment was published in Peter Schäfer and Shaul Shaked, *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza*, vol. 1, Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 42 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 79–82.

38. Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale II.III.214, 78v: 'Igitur si quis vult potestari aut dominari super omnes ventos et demones et omnes cognationes que de celo descendetur in diebus patrum suorum prediscat hunc librum et qualitates eorum et eorum cognationum et omne genus eorum.' Also, in Boudet, "*Liber Bileth*," 329.
39. On the biography of Alemanno, see Johanan ben Isaac Allemanno, *Ḥay ha-ʿolamim* (*L'immortale*). *Parte I*: *La retorica*, ed. Fabrizio Lelli, Quaderni di "Rinascimento" 21 (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1995), 3–17; Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah in Italy, 1280–1510*: *A Survey* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 177–178; Arthur Michael Lesley, "The Song of Solomon's Ascents by Yohanan Alemanno: Love and Human Perfection According to a Jewish Colleague of Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola" (PhD diss., University of California, 1986), 4–11.
40. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France MS heb. 849. Scholem was the first scholar to identify this manuscript as an autograph by Alemanno. See Gershom Scholem, "An Unknown Treatise of Yohanan Alemanno," *Kiryat Sefer* 5 (1928/1929): 273–277. On the use of Dante's *La Divina Commedia* in Alemanno's manuscript see Gal Sofer, "Lover, Son and Prophet: Magic and Kabbalah in The Autobiography of Yohanan Alemanno," *Tarbiẓ* 86 (2019), 663–694 [Hebrew].
41. Bill Rebiger and Peter Schäfer, *Sefer ha-Razim I und II*: *das Buch der Geheimnisse I und II*, vol. 2, Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 132 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 11, 59, 111–114.
42. Paris MS heb. 849, 47r.
43. Alemanno was familiar with the epistle translated by Kalonymos, as noted by Idel. See Moshe Idel, "The Curriculum of Yohanan Alemanno," *Tarbitz* 48 (1980): 323 [Hebrew].
44. Abraham Melamed, *The Myth of the Jewish Origins of Science and Philosophy* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2012), 237–241 [Hebrew].
45. BL Or. 14759, 17v-18r.
46. I would like to thank Dr Liana Saif for confirming the nature of those letters in the text.
47. BL Or. 14759, 41r.
48. Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, ed. Brinsley Nicholson, Reprint (London: E. Stock, 1886), 342.

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CHAPTER 5

Compelling the Other: Esoteric Exorcism as a Reflection of Jewish–Christian Social Tensions in Premodern German Demonic Ritual Magic

Ildikó Glaser-Hille

While Christianity inevitably claimed dominance within the overarching social and political narrative, the fact remains that premodern Europe—that is, about 1350 to about1580[1]—was dynamic, with Jewish, Islamic, and Christian communities closely intertwined with each other, creating intellectual centers, economic hubs, and developing their unique urban culture. Despite being viewed with deep suspicion and mistrust, as on the one hand, Jews were viewed as the original inheritors of God's Covenant, while on the other hand, Christians accused and condemned them for the killing of Jesus, Jewish communities fully participated in the creation and shaping of the society in which they lived.[2]

Marked with tensions and violent discourse, the writings produced between about 1350 and about 1580 in premodern Germany mirrored

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the social attitudes and reflected the changing landscape. This is evident in the premodern study of magic, which served as a space of interaction for Jewish and Christian communities.[3] This intercultural space and its accompanying social discourse are apparent in texts of German Christian ritual magic written during this period, particularly those which involves the invoking of transempirical beings.[4] While the texts are examples of Jewish and Islamic magical practices that were reconfigured to a Christian audience, Christian magical texts mirrored the prevailing supersession theology that permeated Christian social, political, and religious thought: as Jesus was the new covenant between God and God's Chosen People, Christianity fulfilled God's promise and Judaism became irrelevant, as well as inferior to what was perceived as Christian truth. It is this unique Christian reconfiguration of ritual magic that invokes demons through exorcism that allows the Christian operator to control and compel the older Jewish magical blueprint that made up demonic ritual magic.

This chapter will present an approach to premodern Christian demonic ritual magic texts by focusing on the connection between exorcism and supersession theology within premodern German demonic ritual magic. By looking at the use of exorcism within two anonymously written texts—*Liber Iuratus Honorii* (Sworn Book of Honorius, hereto referred as the *Sworn Book*)[5] and *Codex Latinus Monacensis (CLM) 849*[6]—as well as *De occulta philosophia* (On Occult Philosophy), written by Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1536),[7] I will show that—though dependent on older Jewish magic—Christian demonic ritual magic attempted to Christianize the influences through the inclusion of the Second Covenant, the emphasis on the link between Christian piety and the efficacy of demonic magic, and underscoring that Christian names held more power, thus becoming a magical supersession theology.

Jewish Ritual Magic[8]

As many premodern Christians sought out Jewish magicians for their reputed skills, believed to be "natural guardians of magical knowledge,"[9] it is appropriate to begin with a brief discussion on Jewish magic.

It is somewhat complicated to accurately describe "Jewish magic;" on the one hand, there is the biblical prohibition against the practice of magic (Deut. 18:10–11), and on the other hand, the practice of magic was a recognized reality and an integral aspect of the lived experiences for Jewish communities.[10] This attempt to delineate activities as "magic" is further compounded by the fact that there is no clear definition of what

constitutes "magic" as understood by Jewish magical and ritual experts of the time. We are then faced with the challenge of attempting to define "Jewish magic," given a sociohistorical context where the distinctions between "magic," "religion," and "culture" were blurred—if such a distinction existed at all.[11]

Furthermore, when it comes to tracing the development of Jewish magic within texts, the difficulty lies in the identifying of the manuscripts as magical because they rarely name themselves as such, instead describing acts of *kishuf* (forbidden) rather than the conceptual category of what we may call "magic."[12] Despite this, we see evidence of ritual magic in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmud, and in the writings and artifacts belonging to a number of Jewish communities living in the Roman empire and Sassanian Babylonia.[13]

What we can discern is that as Jewish communities were part of their larger social fabric, they were influenced by multiple narratives—including those about magic—that flowed through the cultural environment. These narratives had, as Sara Ronis mentioned, an effect on rabbis in particular, as it helped to shape both rabbinic identities and the rabbinic discourse about magic.[14] The emphasis in many rabbinically written Jewish magical texts revolved around the question of who could best perform the magic, particularly the magic involving transempirical beings. Because of the necessity for deep religious knowledge, ritual purity, and the power that stemmed from them, transempirical ritual magic was, according to the rabbis, best left to the religious experts—namely rabbis. It is no wonder then that the Talmud and many Jewish magical texts depicted rabbis as talented magicians, underscoring their authority, knowledge, and power.[15]

Rabbinic magic becomes an indication of power and authority: the rabbis' great knowledge—including that of magic—along with their piety allowed them to safely perform dangerous and transgressive magic, giving the rabbis permission to use magic to interact with transempirical beings.[16] What we see is the establishing of a framework that shaped the ritual magic expert: pious, learned, knowledgeable, and magically powerful. It is this combination that will be carried through the Hekhalot (palaces) literature into premodernity and Christian ritual magic.

Providing a rich source for the later premodern ritual magic, Hekhalot literature was a genre of Jewish literary texts dating from around the ninth century with a possible earlier composition date.[17] Rituals found in Hekhalot literature placed a focus on using the power hidden in the universe through the mastery of the Torah and its deeper truth. Seen to be so powerful that the rituals were considered dangerous, and cautioning the

practitioners to be wary with whom they shared the literature and its secrets, Hekhalot is a complex system of "interrelated" texts[18] that are characterized by several central themes (wisdom, Torah, rituals, and divine interactions); goals (including transempirical invocations, angelic answers in dreams, Torah memorizations, and heavenly tours); hymns praising God, lists of angelic and divine names, and descriptions of heaven itself. However, while many Hekhalot texts are magical, not all were considered to be such.[19]

In spite of the challenges in understanding what constitutes Jewish magic, through the clues provided by Hekhalot literature, we are able to identify several characteristics that allow us to tentatively classify certain rituals, actions, and practices as "Jewish magic."[20] Most rituals demand a rigorous preparation before the act and often included long periods of fasting, frequent bathing, and avoiding sex and women.[21] For the rituals themselves, Torah was often used, and the magician's wisdom and religious authority must be unassailable. The rituals are meticulously detailed, with the acts to be performed with a specific goal in mind: to heal, to protect, to invoke an angelic being for divine mediation, or for a heavenly tour.[22]

I wish to highlight two key characteristics in many Jewish magical rituals, as they will become important in the later discussion. The first is the emphasis on letters and names. Believed to have been created either right before the first Sabbath (Mishnah, *Avot 5:8*) or right before creation (Kabbalah, *Sefer Yetzirah 1:2–3*), letters and names were thought to have contributed to the very act of creation through their proximity to its source. Because of this, they contain within them an inherent power, one that the proper magician could tap into—including the right to utter the name of God.[23]

The second characteristic is the description of who could successfully perform the ritual magic. According to the Talmud, gentile magicians are unable to produce anything larger than a camel, and even their attempts at conjuring a donkey failed as the beast was a mere illusion. It was Jewish rabbis, equipped with the correct piety, religious authority, and magical knowledge, who were superior magicians (*b. Sanhendrin* 67).[24] What we have is a description of who is the valid magician: learned, capable of study, ritually pure, and pious, and because of this, powerful, thereby legitimizing the rabbis as ritual magical experts.[25]

Christian Ritual Magic

Magic was part of the everyday premodern landscape and was understood as a natural force, much like gravity.[26] By the twelfth century, as monastic, ecclesiastic, magical, and scholarly traditions began to overlap, Christian ritual magic was conceived, influenced by antiquity, Jewish, and Islamic treatises brought into Europe. Like its Jewish predecessors, many of the Christian rituals demanded extensive preparation: periods of fasting, sexual abstinence, confessions, prayers, and attendance at Mass. Evocative of clerical training, most texts were written in Latin, with Hebrew and Greek phrases included, and assumed an understanding of Christian liturgy.[27]

One of the goals of Christian ritual magic was driven by a desire to attain knowledge, to uncover and understand the hidden laws of nature, or to intimately immerse oneself with the divine, often through the aid of transempirical beings. Even demonic ritual magic texts include rituals that attempted to receive divine inspiration and guidance. The authors and the texts claim an orthodox, doctrinal, canonical legitimacy sanctioned by God—both in the rituals and in the knowledge gained in the process.[28]

While most operators felt they had little to fear from transempirical beings like angels and saints, the fallen spirit or a demon was understood to be a hostile being who would not hesitate to bring harm. Because of this, the magician who conjured a demonic entity had to be prepared for a battle for control by being spiritually pure, with words of power on hand.[29]

Christian Demonic Ritual Magic[30]

Despite its Jewish, Islamic, and Graeco-Roman influences, premodern demonic ritual magic appears to be a Christian invention, with liturgy and exorcism as part of the ritual.[31] Like other forms of ritual magic, the goal of a demonic ritual magical spell could include gaining divine knowledge through the control of fallen angels, as well as cursing enemies with ill fortune; discovering hidden treasure; catching thieves; or attaining longevity.[32] Demons were conjured to obey the practitioner through the conjurer's skill, piety, and the power of the name of God, Christ, Mary, and/or the angels. This is where the true source of power for the Christian practitioner lay: within Christian liturgy, Scriptures, words of power, and spiritual, ritual, and physical purity.[33] It is no wonder that a large percentage of demonic ritual magic practitioners were Christian and

university-educated—clerics, monks, scholars, and students—and presumably had access to funds to purchase books and ritual tools.[34]

The rituals were elaborate. Requiring specific clothes and tools, extensive and precise preparation, ritual fasts, blessing of the ritual space, and calculation of auspicious days with precise astrological formulas, the texts prescribed ways to conjure, bind, and then to dismiss demons. Often included were extra exorcism sections that served as a precaution, just in case the ritual was unsuccessful and the wrong demon was accidentally summoned.[35]

Demonic ritual magic shared a liturgical pattern akin to exorcism with an additional step: the practitioner calls the demon using the proper words, commands it, and then compels it to obey the conjurer's wishes. Because of the powerful nature of the demon, the practitioner must trust in the power granted through the rite, their own magical skill and knowledge, and their Christian faith.[36] The dangerous nature of the rituals necessitated the operator to be stronger than the demon—a strength that is predicated on the strength of their piety. A journey into such transgressive territory is not an exercise for the ill-prepared or the weak-of-faith.

Exorcism and Supersession

The history of Catholic exorcism is complex.[37] Stemming from the narratives in the New Testament in which Jesus was able to command demons, who recognized his divine authority by obeying him, and instructed his true followers to cast out the demonic beings in his own name, early Christian exorcism was relatively simple: announce the name of Jesus and pray.[38] By the Middle Ages, exorcism often included ritual. Multiple forms of exorcism were practiced by a number of Christians—including clergy, charismatics, and laity—and these could be used to treat everything from demonic possession and crises of faith to toothaches and eliminating pest infestations. While not all exorcisms were conducted by priests, some rites came with the recommendation that an ordained clergy member performed them, as they required the presence of the Eucharist. It was only in 1614 that an official Church liturgical rite of exorcism was composed, sanctioned, and used until 1999, when it was changed by the Vatican.[39]

As a whole, Christian exorcism is both the identification and the expulsion of anything that stood in opposition of the Church, and by extension, God's divine authority through the power granted by the name of Jesus, Christian saints, and angels. In other words, Christian exorcism was an

exercise that involved Christian power, Christian names, and Christian faith.[40] Controlling demons was an acknowledgment of the Christian power of the ritualist, which can only be accomplished by the strength of the person's piety and holiness.

Translated into this study, the inclusion of exorcism within premodern Christian demonic ritual magic was a way to Christianize the Jewish influences. This placed the power over demons within Christian hands, and became a move to magically reify the Christian view that Christianity has replaced Judaism as God's Chosen People. Supersession theology holds that the covenant between God and Israel was superseded by a new covenant; the idea of Christians learning, and eventually improving upon, techniques of ritual magic is therefore aligned with that thought. As we shall see, this becomes particularly apparent when the portrayal of demons is understood as mirroring the Christian understanding of Jews during this time: powerful yet transgressive, a threat that needed to be contained.

Being Christian: Supersession and Magical Authority

This move to magically reify supersession theology is particularly apparent in the *Sworn Book*, a fourteenth century text whose rituals were influenced by Hekhalot literature.[41] According to the Christian text, Jews "would not be able to work for this vision, because they had lost their gift since the coming of Christ, nor can they attain heaven, for as the Lord says, 'he who is not baptised is condemned,' and so will imperfectly work all things angelic."[42] The author further cautions that "this is the book, which knows no law except Christian, and those of other faiths will not benefit from."[43] The link between magical efficacy and the piety of the practitioner are central concepts in both corpora of literature; piety is just as important as the praxis of the Hekhalot rituals, as is the central importance of the Torah and Jewish law,[44] indicating more than a nodding familiarity with Jewish esoteric practices on the part of the *Sworn Book*'s Christian author.[45]

What we see here is a redefinition of magical authority—that is, who has the right to conjure and control transempirical beings. The power of the magicians is derived from their Christian identity. The text highlights the crucial importance of the belief in Christ in order to be able to perform the magic—much as the earlier Talmudic magic designated the rabbis as true magicians. The inferences are clear: not only the text grounded in Christian ideology, in spite of its palpable Jewish influence, but the ability to fully work the magic and the promises it holds is reserved only

for Christians. Jews, according to the supersession narrative, lost their power and the grace of God due to their refusal to accept Jesus and Christian truth. This affirms the prevailing Christian assumptions about the transgressive power of Jews, who were at once inheritors and rejectors of God's Covenant, a theme explored in the next section.

Sacraments, the Covenant, and Demonic Magic

The importance of the Second Covenant and Christian piety in mastering demonic magic is apparent in the first section of the *Sworn Book*, which begins with a reaffirmation of the Christian faith, echoing a Christian prayer:

> In the name of the living and true God, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons, one God, the giver of life, destroyer of death, who is called "who overcame our death and through rising, restored life, and created the New Testament."[46]

Jews no longer receive the full benefits of the rituals when attempting to conjure the transempirical beings. Because of their refusal to accept the Christian truth, Jews are blinded to their own history, and so are denied the end results provided by the rituals. This is linked back to the idea of the covenant, a motif that is prevalent in the *Sworn Book* and *De occulta philosophia*. The texts become analogous to the covenant: while the older, Jewish conjuration was necessary, it is only through the Christian idea of the Second Covenant that the true power and the true control of the transempirical being—and with it, the true knowledge of God and other divine secrets—could be attained.[47] This is particularly observable in the first purification in preparation for the rituals: there the author advises the practitioner to attend Mass, and "to say the 2nd prayer after 'Te Igitur' during Mass, and the 3, 4, 5, 7, 8 prayers and let the priest, while consecrating the body of Christ, say a prayer for him so through the grace of God, the petition is effective."[48]

The presence of the Eucharist within a Jewish-influenced Christian ritual further strengthens the link between exorcism and magically reifying supersession theology: by including the element that embodies the Second Covenant, Christian magicians are establishing themselves as the true holders of the covenant and the true authority of ritual magic.[49]

Furthermore, the understanding that it is through faith in Jesus as the Second Covenant that the magician is able to harness the necessary power

is also noticeable in *De occulta philosophia*. That Agrippa believed that the truest interpretation and approach to magic was through a Christian lens is undeniable:

> Hence, the Hebrews and Kabbalists, experts in divine names, can no longer operate the ancient names after Christ, as their fathers have once done. As experience has proven, no evil demons nor any powers from hell, that which can vex or harass humanity, can resist this name, but they will kneel and obey when the name of Jesus is reverently pronounced; not only the name, but they will also quake at the sign of the cross.[50]

Here Agrippa avers that one is guided to know when the name of Jesus is "invoked in the Holy Spirit with a clear, pure mind and fervent spirit,"[51] reiterating his Christo-centric perspective that underlies his *summa*. In this vein, he also emphasized the necessity of sacraments when expelling demons:

> But the bad demons can be conquered by us through the help of the good, especially when they appeal to God the sanctity of the sacred words and the conversation and the horrible incantation—by conjuring the divine power by venerated names and signs of supernatural powers, by miracles, by sacraments, by sacred mysteries and such; which indeed, *conjuration or exorcism* are done in the names of religion and divine virtue [emphasis mine].[52]

We have two inferences: the first is that after Christ, the power of the Jewish magicians, despite their potent magical lineage, is rendered almost useless. The name of Christ has been equated with God—and *vis à vis* the Trinity, Jesus is God—and therefore it becomes more powerful than the tradition it has appropriated. Second, we can see that demons can only be fully conquered not only through the name of Jesus, but also through Christian sacraments. It is through Christian faith that the initiates would be able to expunge the demons from their space, and their identity as powerful magicians would be renewed, built on the ability to expel the demons: not through tradition, but through their faith in Jesus and the sacraments.

The implications are clear: it is not the religious office but rather the strength of the magician's Christian piety that would enable not only the proper use of the rituals detailed within but also the reception of the Christian truth. The emphasis on situating Christian ritual magic within Christian canonical theology is deliberate.[53] It is more than a legitimizing

of a particular form of theology; it is a conscious reification of supersession theology: only the true Christian would be able to supersede the Jewish truth that formed the bedrock of the Christian world, on both the canonical and magical theological levels.

Power of the Names

In using divine names to control transempirical beings, the Christian operator is simultaneously emphasizing the magical authority, power, and transgressive potential of the Jewish community. This is particularly noticeable within Christian demonic ritual magic, as it is primarily through the name of Christ that one can properly invoke and control transempirical beings; the Jewish source has lost its power.[54] We can see this in the ritual designed to obtain information on a fingernail found in *CLM 849*, where the operator must invoke the Tetragrammaton, the names of Christ and God, the stages of Christ's life, and the angelic hierarchies before conjuring the aforementioned demons:

> In the holy names of Christ: Messyas; Sother; Emmanuel; Sabaoth; Adonay; Panthon; Panthocrathon; Eloy; Theos; Hon; Vision; Salvation; Alpha and Omega; first and last; the first born; the beginning and the end; the way; truth; and wisdom; virtue; comforter; I am who I am; who is; mediator; lamb; sheep; goat; calf; serpent; kid; word; image; glory; grace; salvation; light; salt; peace; splendor; bread; fountain; vine; pastor; prophet; immortal hope; king; father; all-powerful; compassionate; eternal; complete good; Trinity; unity; father; El; Elo; Eloe; Elon' Saday; Symator; Tu; Ye; Ye; prince of peace; Enstriel; spirit; fear; piety; you; unity of unity; the three godhead, and so forth, etc.[55]

This emphasis on the power of the name creates a link between compelling demons by their names and Genesis 2:19–20, where God brings the animals to Adam so that he may name, and by extension, claim dominion over them. The argument can be made that, through the naming of demons and the use of the names of Christ to compel them, Christian magicians are, in essence, becoming Adam and claiming dominion over the transempirical world.

We can further see this emphasis on the power of the names in *De occulta philosophia*'s Book III Chapter 24, which discusses the true names of the good and bad spirits. As Agrippa writes, although the names of the

spirits are legion, God knows them all, and they can be revealed to humans only through divine revelation, though the "Masters of the Hebrews"[56] believe that as Adam was given the gift to name all the creatures (cf. Genesis 2:19–20), that power extends to spirits as well. However, Agrippa stated that demons are named according to their offices—deceiver, fornicator, and so on[57]—whereas the names of angels are divinely given, only revealed to the pious magician. The implication in the text is that the names of the demons are derived from (earthly) tradition. This hints at the perceived limitations in Jewish thought and tradition, echoing the prevalent supersession theology. Even though Agrippa acknowledges the prevalent idea that "Hebrew was the first of all languages given directly by the heavens,"[58] the actual naming—and therefore the power to control—transempirical beings was misinterpreted. Because Christians properly interpreted the scriptures—and by extension, the inner workings of God's cosmos—they were able to learn the true names of all beings. Jews, on the other hand, were only able to name the baser demons. Put differently, although their tradition preserved the names of the demons, it could not properly preserve the names of angelic beings. We see here an implicit undercurrent linking the perception of Jews to demons: although both originally were given God's grace, they have chosen to deny it, echoing many Christian polemics that insist Jews misconstrued the covenant as described in the Hebrew Bible.[59]

Conclusion

In unpacking the claim that demonic ritual magic reifying supersession theology by exorcizing Jewish elements from the magical sphere, it is vital to highlight that these texts consistently affirm and emphasize power in various forms. If the practitioner's power to call, command, and banish demons is derived from their faith and fueled by the name and power of Christ, then these rituals serve to affirm the practitioner's identity as a faithful Christian versed in magic. Just as Jesus gave power to his followers to compel demons in his own name, the use of the names of Jesus is particularly effective—not just invoking the demons, but also commanding them; the magicians are demonstrating their (literally) God-given power to control demons and master the unseen forces of the cosmos. Conjuration is thus an active (re)creation of the ritual space as Christian, a declaration of Christian power, and an affirmation of a particular Christian identity. This move ties in with the Christian understanding of themselves as being

members of a new covenant and, accordingly, it makes sense to understand the texts through this lens.

With the link between the appropriation of Jewish themes and the theology of supersession established, it seems clear that the emphasis on exorcism also reads as a desire to exorcize the Jewish roots of magic. As stated, exorcism is more than a simple banishing of demons: it is an identification of that which stands in opposition to God by identifying, isolating, and controlling those who are not part of the Christian faith—that is, those who are "Other." Through exorcism, the authors are identifying the Jewish elements of the magic, separating them, and controlling them, by both banishing and Christianizing them, and effectively exorcizing the Christian magical space from all those elements that they believe to stand in opposition to Christian truth.

Through controlling demons and exorcizing them, the practitioner is able to subjugate the demons to obey their bidding. In the same way, through the power of exorcism, the operator is also controlling and magically purging the Jewish elements within the magic: by superimposing the name of Jesus, that is, the Christian's understanding of the Second Covenant, the ritual is able to magically control the older covenant—that is, the Jewish elements—of the magic. The focus is not only on the magical supersession theology, but also on the piety of the magician. Exorcism becomes a litmus test of faith: through the practice, the faithful would be able to control the transempirical being—an element that becomes integral in both Christian canonical theology and Christian ritual magic.[60]

According to standard narratives, demons were angels whose pride caused their fall from grace, who can never again be in God's presence, and therefore cannot accept God's grace. We see a similar parallel here: because Christians believed that because Jews refused to accept the Christian truth, they were not granted the full gift of the ritual magic. They are, according to Christian thought, formerly the Chosen People, who fell from grace because they did not accept Jesus, the gift and the grace of God. Jews, with their former access to the truth, are now unable to receive the full truth to be able to fully perform magic.

Like the demons who retained their angelic knowledge pre-Fall, Jews were acknowledged as being powerful magicians, but like demons, they had "fallen" because of their rejection of Christ. The demons are used analogously to portray not only the supersession theology woven into the social fabric, but also to highlight the importance the Jewish magician has within the formation of a Christian magical identity: one whose

knowledge and capabilities, though tied to their lineage, are still insufficient, due to their lack of true belief. Demons came to represent Jews as Christians perceived them: given the chance to bask in the grace of God, but fallen, and therefore controllable and imperfect beings, that despite their inherent powerful knowledge, were still flawed in their inability to accept Christian truth. The ritual thus serves to affirm the practitioner's identity as a faithful Christian: by demonstrating their God-given power to control demons, the magicians thereby imitate Jesus within the magical sphere by engaging with their most dangerous foe.

Was such magical—and by extension, esoteric—knowledge considered to be forbidden or rejected? Like most premodern lived activities, the answer is nuanced and complex. What we call today esotericism was ingrained in premodernity's everyday life: almanacs contained astrology, spells were used in conjunction with prayers, and talismans were worn for protection. It was not a separate tradition, but rather an integral aspect of premodern reality. Instead, I argue that the Christianization of the Jewish magical space was an appropriation of Jewish esoteric knowledge that allowed premodern Christians to assert control over the ritual magic space. The truth is, which magical knowledge was forbidden by whom largely depended on a number of factors, including who the practitioner was, the nature of the magic, and the social context, becoming a complex question of legitimacy rather than outright rejection. It is perhaps more accurate to state that it is our contemporary apprehension to consider such activities as being a part of the worldview, and therefore possibly valid, that makes premodern esotericism "forbidden."[61] We have rejected the evaluation of esoteric activities as part of the lived premodern reality, delineating such activities as fringe, thereby impoverishing our understanding of the complexities of the social and cultural dynamics at play.

Notes

1. Though the dates may seem arbitrary, this was a transitional age, witnessing a number of intellectual, social, and political activities that changed the social, political, cultural, and religious landscape of Europe. Notably, this era saw the development of new scientific methods; popular revolts; rising literacy rates due to the moveable printing press; the Reformation and Counter-Reformation; the Council of Trent; European colonialism; and the rise of capitalism as Europe's primary economic activity. David Nichols, *Urban Europe: 1100–1700* (Houndsmill: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), vii,

1–23; David Niremberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 18, 231–232. See also John W. O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013).

2. Israel Jacob Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. Barbara Harshav and Jonathan Chipman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 27; Olav Hammer and Kocku von Stuckrad, "Introduction: Western Esotericism and Polemics," in *Polemic Encounters: Esoteric Discourse and Its Others*, ed. Olav Hammer and Kocku von Stuckrad (Leiden: Brill, 2007), xi; Steven F. Kruger, *The Spectral Jew: Conversion and Embodiment in Medieval Europe*, Medieval Cultures (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 40; Moshe Rosman, "Foreword," in *Holy Dissent: Jewish and Christian Mystics in Eastern Europe*, ed. Glenn Dynner (Detroit MI: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 23; Kocku von Stuckrad, "Christian Kabbalah and Anti–Jewish Polemics: Pico in Context" in *Polemic Encounters*, ed. Hammer and Stuckrad, 15. See also Robert Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom: 1000–1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
3. Daniel Jütte, *The Age of Secrecy: Jews, Christianity, and the Economy of Secrets: 1400–1800*, trans. Jeremiah Riemer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 85–86; Katelyn Mesler, "The *Liber Iuratus Honorii* and the Christian Reception of Angel Magic" in *Invoking Angels: Theurgic Idea and Practices, Thirteenth to Sixteenth Centuries*, ed. Claire Fanger (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2012), 114.
4. I will be using "transempirical" as a general term to describe non-human intelligent beings and their realm. This will be less cumbersome than "angels, demons, and other spirits." See Armin W. Geertz, "Religious Narrative, Cognition and Culture: Approaches and Definitions," in *Religious Narrative, Cognition and Culture: Image and Word in the Mind of Narrative*, ed. Armin W. Geertz and Jeppe Sinding Jensen (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2011), 9.
5. Attributed to "Honorius, son of Euclid, master of Thebes," the text presented itself as an "overarching magical approach to the world," with rituals for the invoking and commanding transempirical beings to see the face of God and absorb the wisdom of the universe.

   See Gösta Hedegård's critical edition of *Liber Iuratus Honorii: A Critical Edition of the Latin Version of the Sworn Book of Honorius* edited by Gösta Hedegård and Studia Latina Stockholmiensia (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2002). Translations are my own, unless indicated.
6. Also known as *Munich Manual of Demonic Magic*, the manuscript was published in the late fifteenth century. See Richard Kieckhefer's translitera-

tion of *CLM 849* in the appendix of his *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1998). Translations are my own, unless indicated.

7. Written in 1532 in three volumes, this compendium of neoplatonic thought, magic, Christian Kabbalah, alchemy, and an understanding of the role of transempirical beings attempted to systematize all esoteric knowledge, emphasizing a link with the divine. See Vittoria Perrone Compagni's critical edition: Agrippa, Heinrich C. *De Occulta Philosophia*, edited by Vittoria Perrone Compagni (Leiden: Brill, 1992). Translations are my own, unless indicated.
8. For more on Jewish magic, see: Gideon Bohak, "Jewish Magic in the Middle Ages," in *The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West: From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. David J. Collins, S. J., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): 268–300; Edward Goldberg, *Jews and Magic in Medici Florence: The Secret World of Benedetto Blanis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); Yuval Harari, *Jewish Magic Before the Rise of Kabbalah*, translated by Batya Stein (Detroit MI: Wayne State University Press, 2017); Moshe Idel, "Jewish Magic from the Renaissance Period to Early Modern Hasidism" in *Religion, Science, and Magic in Concert and in Conflict*, edited by Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Paul Virgil McCracken Flesher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 82–117; Daniel Jütte, *The Age of Secrecy*; David B. Ruderman, *Kabbalah, Magic and Science: The Cultural Universe of a Sixteenth-Century Jewish Physician* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Peter Schäfer, "Jewish Magic Literature in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 41 (1990): 75–91; Dov Schwartz, *Studies on Astral Magic In Medieval Jewish Thought*, Brill Reference Library of Judaism (Leiden: Brill, 2004).
9. Jütte, *Age of Secrecy*, 85.
10. Harari, *Jewish Magic*, 1; Jütte, *Age of Secrecy*, 85; Sara Ronis, "Intermediary Beings in Late Antique Judaism: A History of Scholarship," *Currents in Biblical Research* 14, no. 1 (October 2015): 100; Kimberly Stratton, "Imagining Power: Magic, Miracle, and the Social Context of Rabbinic Self-Representation," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73, no. 2 (2005): 366.

    This is further complicated when we rely in our contemporary understanding of what magic is. What we today might categorize as "magic" may not be the same category of "magic" in a given time period or culture. For a discussion on this distinction and how it pertains to the study of Jewish magic, see Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), especially the Introduction.

11. Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 3–5; Harari, *Jewish Magic*, 1; Ronis, "Intermediary Being," 100; Stratton, "Imagining Power," 366. In his study on the Karaites's conceptualizations of magic and miracles, Robinson identifies "the nexus of magic and miracle" (41), a worldview where both magic and miracles coexist. While miracles were understood to be events that break the laws of nature (ordained by God), magic was understood to operate within the natural realm and is a human rather than divine accomplishment. See: Ira Robinson, "Jacob al-Kirkisani on the Reality of Magic and the Nature of the Miraculous: A Study in Tenth-Century Karaite Rationalism" *Truth and Compassion* (1983): 41–53.
12. Harari, *Jewish Magic*, 1, 2–3; 31; Sara A. Ronis, "'Do Not Go Out Alone at Night:' Law and Demonic Discourse in the Babylonian Talmud" (PhD diss., Yale University, May 2015), 10–11. See Philip S. Alexander, "The Talmudic Concept of Conjuring ('Ahizat 'Einayim) and the Problem of the Definition of Magic (*Kishuf*)," in *Creation and Re-Creation in Jewish Thought: Festschrift in Honor of Joseph Dan on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Rachel Elior and Peter Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 7–26, for a discussion of the development of this term.
13. Ronis, "Intermediary Beings," 100. For Talmudic magic, see: Kimberly Stratton, "Imagining Power," 361–393; Jonathan Seidel, "Charming Criminals: Classification of Magic in the Babylonian Talmud," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki, Religions in the Greco-Roman World (Leiden: Brill, 1995); Saul Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1962); Daniel Sperber, *Magic and Folklore in Rabbinic Literature* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1994).
14. Sara Ronis, "Space, Place, and the Race for Power: Rabbis, Demons, and the Construction of Babylonia," *Harvard Theological Review* 110, no. 4 (2017): 589; Andrea Dawn Lobel, "Under a Censored Sky: Astronomy and Rabbinic Authority in the Talmud Bavli and Related Literature" (PhD thesis, Concordia University, 2015), 75, 188–190.
15. Rebecca Macy Lesses, "Exe(o)rcising Power: Women as Sorceresses, Exorcists, and Demonesses in Late Antique Judaism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69 (June 2001): 344; Stratton, "Imagining Power," 366, 374–376; Lobel, "Under a Censored Sky," 188. While we may think that only rabbis practiced magic, this is based on the fact that many surviving texts describing ritual magics were rabbinic, giving us a limited scope of the magical lived reality within various Jewish communities.
16. Lobel, "Under a Censored Sky," 186; Stratton, "Imagining Power," 372.
17. Because most examples we have now are preserved in later Ashkenazi Hasidim writings, dating the literature is difficult. With fragmentary evi-

dence found in the Cairo *Geniza*, Lesses hypothesizes that some of the rituals described within had Palestinian roots (fourth to fifth century CE), whereas others originated from Babylonia (fifth to sixth century CE). The texts were then gradually compiled into the corpus of literature: Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 330; Lesses, *Ritual Practices*, 55; Schäfer, *Hidden and Manifest God*, 5–8; Michael D. Swartz, *Scholastic Magic: Ritual and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 4.

For more on Hekhalot literature, see Peter Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism*; David R. Blumenthal, *The Merkabah Tradition and the Zoharic Tradition*, vol 1 of *Understanding Jewish Mysticism: A Source Reader* (New York: KTAV, 1978); Rebecca Macy Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power: Angels, Incantations, and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism*; Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

18. Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 28; Lesses, *Ritual Practices*, 21–22. See Schäfer, *Hidden and Manifest God*, 6–8 for a discussion on how these texts interrelate with each other and with the body of literature as a whole.
19. Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 329–330, 334; J.H. Laenen, *Jewish Mysticism: An Introduction*, trans. David E. Orton (Louisville KY: Westminster Knox Press, 2001), 32; Mesler "The *Liber iuratus Honorii*," 128; Peter Schäfer, "The Ideal of Piety of the Ashkenazi Hasidim and Its Roots in Jewish Tradition," *Jewish History* 4, no. 2 (1990): 14; Schäfer, *Hidden and Manifest God*, 9; Michael D. Swartz, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and Later Jewish Magic and Mysticism," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 8, no. 2 (2001): 187–188; Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 4. For a discussion on the themes and goals, see Lesses, *Ritual Practices*, 64–67, 82–85.
20. Though, perhaps it is more accurate to call these sets "rabbinic magic."
21. Lesses, *Ritual Practices*, 11.
22. Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 4; Schäfer, *Hidden and Manifest God*, 9; Harari, *Jewish Magic*, 11; Lesses, *Ritual Practices*, 4–5.
23. Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, "You Will Find It in the Pharmacy: Practical Kabbalah and Natural Medicine in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, 1690–1750," in *Holy Dissent: Jewish and Christian Mystics in Eastern Europe*, ed. Glenn Dynner (Detroit MI: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 16; Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 20; Lesses, *Ritual Practices*, 64.
24. Stratton, "Imagining Power," 367.
25. Harari, *Jewish Magic*, 11; Stratton, "Imagining Power," 367.
26. The debates focused on questions of whether magic was fundamentally beneficial or harmful, what types of magic were acceptable for Christians or Jews, who was qualified to practice it, and whether or not the feat was

magic or a miracle. Magic was also used as a polemic device to delineate the "Other's" activity as not divinely endorsed (cf. footnote 11). Robinson, "Jacob al-Kirkisani," 41–42; Jütte, *Age of Secrecy*, 86–88; Claire Fanger, "Christian Ritual Magic in the Middle Ages," *History Compass* 11, no. 8 (2013): 610–618.

27. Frank Klaassen, *The Transformation of Magic: Illicit Learned Later Middle Ages and Renaissance*, Magic in History (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2013), 117–118, 154.
28. Frank Klaassen, "Medieval Ritual Magic in the Renaissance," *Aries* 3, no. 2 (2003): 172–173.
29. Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 16.
30. See: Jean-Patrice Boudet, *Entre science et nigromance: Astrologie, divination et magie dans l'Occident médiéval (XII–XV siècle)*, Histoire ancienne et médiévale 83 (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2006); Florence Chave-Mahir and Julien Véronèse, *Rituel d'exorcism ou manuel de magie?: La manuscrit CLM 10085 de la Bayerische Staatsbibliothek de Munich (début de XVe siècle)*, (Florence: Sismel Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2015); László Sándor Chardonnens, "Necromancing Theurgic Magic: A Reappraisal of the *Liber iuratus* Extracts and the Consecration Ritual for the *Sigillum Dei* in an Early Modern English Grimoire," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* vol 10, no. 2 (2015): 172–198.
31. Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages, Second Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 165–175; Klaassen, *Transformations of Magic*, 115–116.
32. Klaassen, "English Manuscripts of Magic, 1300–1500: A Preliminary Survey" in *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic*, ed. Claire Fanger (University Park: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1998), 20–23. Klaassen further remarked that despite the fact that demonic magic could bring secular and apocalyptic danger, a market for demonic magic services blossomed.
33. Claire Fanger, "Medieval Ritual Magic: What it is and Why We needs to Know More About It" in *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic*, ed. Claire Fanger (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1998), vii; Klaassen, *Transformations of Magic*, 153.

    It is interesting that a number of demonic ritual magical texts spend a considerable amount of space defending its rituals as being neither illicit (i.e., not attempting to break natural law) nor *maleficia* (i.e. evil magic). The argumentations to contextualize the magic within an (Christian) orthodox framework would indicate that practitioners believed that this was a legitimate practice. See also Maaike Van der Lugt, "'Abominable Mixtures': The *Liber Vaccae* in the Medieval West, or the Dangers and Attractions of Natural Magic," *Traditio* 64 (2009): 229–277.

34. Frank Klaassen, "Learning and Masculinity in Manuscripts of Ritual Magic of the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 38, no. 1 (2007) 50, 54; Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 4. See Chapter 5 in Kieckhefer's *Magic in the Middle Ages* for a discussion on the notion of a "clerical underground."
35. Klaassen, "English Manuscripts of Magic," 20–22; Klaassen, *Transformations of Magic*, 58, 188; Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 14; Fanger, "Medieval Ritual Magic," viii.
36. Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 14; Klaassen, "Learning and Masculinity," 54–55, 64–65.
37. Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason, and Religion, 1250–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 58–62.
38. Cf. Mt. 3: 28–34; 10:1, 10:8; 15: 21–28, 17:14–21; Mk. 5: 1–20; 6:7, 7: 24–30, 9:14–29, 16:17; Lk. 8: 26–39; 9:1, 37–49, 10:17; Acts. 19:11–16.
39. Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 231, 237–8, 241–243; Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 38–40; Francis Young, *History of Exorcism: A History of Exorcism in Catholic Christianity*, Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1, 17–18, 59, 68–70 100–101, 108, 117. Also see Matt Goldish, ed., *Spirit Possession in Judaism: Cases and Contexts from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003); Nancy Caciola, "Mystics, Demoniacs, and the Physiology of Spirit Possession in Medieval Europe," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no. 2 (2000): 268–306; and F. Chave-Mahir's *L'Exorcisme des Possédés dans l'Eglise d'Occident (Xe–XIVe siècle)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011).
40. Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 231; Young, *History of Exorcism*, 5, 26.
41. Mesler, "The *Liber Iuratus Honorii*," 117.
42. *Liber Iuratus Honorii*, Chapt I, ln. 20–21. Hedegård, ed., *Liber Iuratus Honorii*, 66.
43. *Liber Iuratus Honorii*, Chapt. CXL, ln. 4. Hedegård, ed., *Liber Iuratus Honorii*, 150.
44. See, for example, the *Sar-Torah* where Israel ("beloved people") is singled out to receive God's secrets: James R. Davila, *Descenders to the Chariot: The People Behind the Hekhalot Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2001, 273).
45. Mesler, "The *Liber Iuratus Honorii*," 117.
46. *Liber Iuratus Honorii*, Chapt. III, ln.5–6. Hedegård, ed., *Liber Iuratus Honorii*, 60.
47. Claire Fanger, "Covenant and the Divine Name: Revisiting the *Liber iuratus* and John of Morigny's *Liber florum*," in *Invoking Angels: Theurgic Idea and Practices, Thirteenth to Sixteenth Centuries*, ed. Claire Fanger (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2012), 193–194, 203.

48. *Liber Iuratus Honorii*, Chapt. LII, ln.8. Hedegård, *Liber Iuratus Honorii*, 92. The prayers are those listed within the *Sworn Book*, with a number of chapters dedicated to prayers for the appropriate ritual (Hedegård, *Liber Iuratus Honorii*, 31).
49. It is salient to note that anxieties around the Eucharist are linked to rumors of host desecrations. See: R. Po-Chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Miri Rubin, "Imagining the Jew: The Late Medieval Eucharistic Discourse," in *In and Out of the Ghetto: Jewish–Gentile* Relations in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany, ed. R. Po-Chia Hsia and Hartmut Lehmann (Washington D.C.: German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 1995), 177–208; Miri Rubin's *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).
50. Agrippa, *De Occulta*, Book III, chap. 12. Perrone Compagni, ed., *De Occulta Philosophia*, 436–437.
51. Agrippa, *De Occulta*, Book III, chap. 12. Perrone Compagni, ed., *De Occulta Philosophia*, 436.
52. Agrippa, *De Occulta*, Book III, chap. 32 Perrone Compagni, ed., *De Occulta Philosophia*, 498–499.
53. Richard Kieckhefer, "The Devil's Contemplatives: The *Liber Iuratus*, *The Liber Visionum* and the Christian Appropriation of Jewish Occultism," in *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic*, ed. Claire Fanger (University Park: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1998), 252; Mesler, "The *Liber Iuratus Honorii*," 115.
54. Fanger, "Covenant and the Divine Name," 203.
55. *CLM 849*, No. 39. folio 101–102. Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 336–337.
56. *Hebraeorum magistri*.
57. Agrippa, *De Occulta*, Book 3, Chapt. 24. Perrone Compagni, ed., *De Occulta Philosophia*, 469.
58. Agrippa, *De Occulta*, Book 3, Chapt. 24. Perrone Compagni, *De Occulta*, 467.
59. Hammer and Stuckrad, "Introduction: Western Esotericism and Polemics," viii.
60. Mesler, "The *Liber Iuratus Honorii*," 120.
61. Michael J. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 97; Lawrence M. Principe and William R. Newman, "Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy," in *Secrets of Nature: Astrology and Alchemy in Early Modern Europe*, ed. William R. Newman and Anthony Grafton (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press), 386–388; Klaassen, "Learning and Masculinity," 49–50; Michael D. Bailey, "The Age of Magicians: Periodization in the History of European Magic," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 3, no. 1 (2008): 2.

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PART II

Modern Transfers

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CHAPTER 6

Tlemcen, Algeria: A Would-Be Esoteric Colonial Settlement of the Fin de Siècle

Alexandre Toumarkine

As has often been noted, Western esotericism invented an East of its own, which occupied a central place in its spiritual imagination. This imaginary East was positioned by Western esotericists within the Eastern esoteric tradition they claimed it came from. Actual contacts with real Eastern esoteric figures reported in Western sources are often difficult to trace, however, and when they can be traced, they usually seem rather more superficial than claimed. However, some real encounters did occur. In the case of the Theosophical Society (founded in 1875), such an encounter developed as the Society merged with the Arya Samaj Hindu movement in 1878.[1] If Western occultists and major esoteric protagonists were embedded in the colonial system, they were sometimes far beyond the view of colonial administrations, and some were even active anti-colonialists.[2] Gauri

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Viswanathan, looking beyond political positions, has argued that, in the Indian context, occultism "offered the means for mobility between different personae and world-views otherwise denied or at least circumscribed to the restrictive relations between colonizer and colonized."[3] This argument, and the question of the impact of colonial rule on encounters and the circulation of ideas between Eastern and Western esoteric stakeholders, will be discussed in this chapter.

These questions have so far been considered in the context of the British empire in India, and to a lesser extent in East and Southeast Asia. But for the Middle East (with the exception of Saint Simonianism in Egypt and Algeria),[4] such encounters have generally been studied through an approach based not on groups but on individuals—Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891), René Guénon (1886–1951), Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825–1875)—and relying mainly on their own testimonies or those of their followers. Collective encounters, relations, and exchanges between esoteric groups have not been considered. French colonization and colonial rule in North Africa have not yet been addressed, although colonial Algeria—the only area of North Africa to become part of France—represents a major source.

The colonization process laid down borders between and within spaces where local esotericism was circulating, a first step toward the further nationalization that came with decolonization. At regional and local levels, esoteric organizations were meaningful not only in relation to mobilization against the colonizers, but also in the opposite frame of encounters and dialog. In order to catch both regional and local levels in an Algerian context, this chapter will concentrate on a provincial area rather than the capital, Algiers. Scrutinizing relations and interactions in this area, it will shed light on a setting where a wide range of both local and Western esoteric groups were active. This chapter's focus will therefore be on Tlemcen, a midsize town and district located within the province of Oran, in northwest Algeria.

Tlemcen and the surrounding countryside were conquered by the French colonial army between 1836 and 1842, the town being briefly given back to Abd al-Qadir (1808–1883). Tlemcen was already a garrison city before the French colonization, and its main urban planning continued to reflect this function. The conquest of the Tlemcen region led to the exodus of a substantial part of the local Muslim population to Morocco or to other parts of the Ottoman empire between 1830 and 1842, as well as fostering settlement by Europeans in the region. In Tlemcen town, these settlers lived mainly in houses abandoned by the fleeing "native" population,

sometimes expropriated after the conquest. Most "natives" did come back, but many were obliged to find new homes.[5] The population of the Tlemcen district on the brink of the First World War was roughly 156,400 (around 25,000 for the town itself in 1900). Muslims composed the great majority (130,000), along with local Jews (5000) who had become French citizens after the Crémieux decree (1870); the others were French (15,000) and other European settlers, mainly Spanish and Italian, usually less wealthy than the French.[6]

This chapter will concentrate on the fin-de-siècle period, both a rich period for Western esotericism and a time of social change for a stabilized French colonial rule. It will be argued that the case of Tlemcen shows that indigenous Muslim and Jewish esoteric organizations and movements were impacted in an ambivalent way by colonial rule, which created both protection and a new vulnerability. Three imported esoteric groups (Freemasons, Spiritists, and the followers of the occultist Max Théon) reacted in an ambiguous way to the indigenous groups. Initially, parallels were drawn between indigenous and European phenomena, but ultimately no real dialog developed, for reasons ranging from European conceptions of superiority and scientism to antisemitism, islamophobia, and racism.

Tlemcen Under French Colonial Rule: The Religious, Spiritual, and Esoteric Landscape

We will start with a look at a very small community which, even though imported, is probably the local component that best fits with a narrow definition of esotericism. From the 1870s onwards, Tlemcen's rural area hosted an occultist, Max Théon (1848–1927), known for having inspired the famous Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, a very influential Western occult secret society that was probably established in London in the first years of the 1870s.[7] Théon and his wife established themselves in 1887 in Zarif, a district close to Tlemcen, where they founded the self-proclaimed "Cosmic Movement," an esoteric community sometimes enriched by Western visitors.

Tlemcen had also been renowned for centuries as a major regional Sufi center and an area where the cult of Muslim saints (in French, *marabouts*) was widespread. Esoteric knowledge was also present in the craftsmen's guilds, especially among weavers.[8] The city was also known for its Jewish Kabbalistic tradition, imported from the Iberian peninsula. Last but not

least, a French Masonic lodge was opened in Tlemcen, which seems also to have sheltered Spiritists among the colonizers.[9] This variety of groups makes this city and its countryside a wonderful case study for our purpose.

This short overview suggests a divide between esoteric communities (Spiritists, Freemasons, and the Cosmic Movement) composed of French or European colonizers on the one hand, and autochthonous Muslim—and perhaps also Jewish—communities on the other. Our first aim is to discuss this clear-cut distance between groups, in order to see if some of them shifted, perhaps opening themselves to the other side, or at least managing to dialog or interact with it. We will also consider individual cases in order to track possible multiple belongings and mobilities. Further, we will question the role played by the colonial order and the way it impacted both individual groups and the interaction between them. Our last objective is to check whether the Tlemcenian colonial frame fits the assumption that Wasnathan coined for another context: the ability of esoteric groups to transgress the colonial order without clashing with it.

Sufism as Seen by French Orientalism in Algeria

To better understand the French approach to Sufism in Algeria after its conquest, one has first to place it in a broader perspective, that of Islam as a whole, as recommended by Pierre Vermeren.[10] Soon after the conquest, the *waqfs* (religious endowments, called *ḥubus* in North Africa) that supported institutional Islam were seized by the French "public domain" and sometimes transferred to the municipal administration or even to private owners. The French administration, at first often dominated by the military, was hostile to Islam only when it was seen as a threat, or was at least indifferent to it; even so, all the religious institutions inherited from Algeria's Ottoman rule were disbanded. This collapse of the institutional Islam that had been mainly present in urban areas left plenty of room for the development of Sufi brotherhoods, the cult of "saints" and "popular religion," which prevailed in rural areas.

Tlemcen's countryside is the burial place of Abu Madyan (1126–1198), also known as Sidi Boumediene, who is regarded as one of the great mystics who brought Sufism from al-Andalus to North Africa. He became the patron of the city, and his tomb was a much-visited place. Abu Madyan was not unique: the Tlemcen area had been known for a long time for its tradition of *ziyāra* (pious visit) to the many tombs of Sufi masters and local Muslim "saints," a richness that contributed to shaping both

spirituality and religiosity in the region. Theon visited both Abu Madyan's shrine and other tombs.

From the beginning, the colonial French administration and connected scholars distrusted the *marabouts* and their magic, as well as the locally rooted Sufi brotherhoods, which were perceived as a potential threat to French rule. In a messianic (Mahdist) and eschatological frame, here and there, charismatic local figures presenting themselves as "Masters of the Time" (*mūl al-sā'a*) managed to stir up trouble against the French.[11] However, the colonial authorities eventually shifted to an opposite approach, and became eager to foster and promote the idea of a genuine religiosity based on authentic spirituality and popular religion.

Tlemcen was favored when France decided to build new religious institutions, under its control. It hosted one of the three colonial *madrasas* (religious schools) opened in Algeria in 1850.[12] The Sufi brotherhoods, whatever their attitude had been during the conquest, were subjected to a policy of subjugation, stipends for Sufi shaykhs and the *marabouts*, and control. To facilitate control, the colonial administration produced in-depth knowledge of the brotherhoods (called *khouan* in North Africa), which were often seen as a unified school of thought, *l'école algérienne* (the Algerian school). George Trumbull, however, has strongly contested the idea that the brotherhoods were understood in a wholly consistent manner, insisting—on the contrary—on discursive contradictions in the colonial mindset.[13] The *khouan* were usually understood by French Orientalists as a potential threat to the colonial power, but Trumbull suggests that this fear derived from an analogical approach triggered by the hostility of the secularist republican apparatus to religion itself, which was seen as politically subversive. Accordingly, Muslim brotherhoods were likened to Catholic monastic orders, and analyzed in terms of sociability and performance. The members of the *khouan*, then, were stuck halfway between collaboration and resistance, leaving no room for any other kind of attitude.

Doutté and French Orientalism: a French Colonial Reappraisal of Tlemcenian Popular Islam

Edmond Doutté (1867–1926) moved to Algeria in 1891/92 in order to cure his tuberculosis.[14] His fragile health forced him to leave the colonial administration and move to education and then into research. Based in

Oran, he was appointed a teacher at the Tlemcen colonial *madrasa* in 1898. Doutté never showed any interest in esotericism, whatever its origin, but specialized in Islam as a social scientist, with a focus on *marabouts*, magic, and Sufi brotherhoods. He interpreted the cult of Muslim saints as a pre-Islamic heritage, and considered popular religious culture to be primitive, showing an evolutionist ethnographic bias. His fieldwork in the Tlemcen area focused on the 'Isawiyya brotherhood (Aïssâoua in French), a *khouan* founded in Meknes (Morocco) at the end of the fifteenth century which later spread not only in nearby Tlemcen, but in many areas in North Africa. While Arabic sources focused on the founder of the 'Isawiyya, and French colonial administrators and scholars on the organization of the brotherhood, Doutté instead focused on the rituals of the brotherhood, known for its ecstatic practices with knives and other cutting or sharp objects, a ritual in which music and trance played key roles.[15] The music played by the 'Isawiyya was structured by an esoteric symbolism,[16] but Doutté concentrated only on the ethnographic description of a spectacular procession he attended in February 1899 on the eve of the breaking of the Ramadan fast. The procession unfolded on the eastern road joining Tlemcen to the tomb and village of Sidi Boumediene (Abu Madyan), the patron of Tlemcen, a road Théon's mansion was very close to.

On the third day of the feast, the procession started again, this time heading for Aïn-el-Hout, in the vicinity of a spring known for its sacred fish. Doutté reported the legend associated with these fish, and turning to the Greek word *ichthys*, used as a symbol for the Christ and Christianity, underlined what he called its "cabbalistic" virtue.[17] Doutté's command of Arabic was good enough to allow him to get a clear sense of the words the "brothers" (*khouan*) were chanting. However, their incantations, in his view, were valuable not for any presumed symbolic efficiency of coded words, but for their performative merit. Doutté not only questioned the esoteric nature of the 'Isawiyya's rituals, but assumed their primitive nature, even though he knew that the wild performances he described were not part of the original teachings of the brotherhood. This assumption was not far from Théon's views on local mysticism, which it considered anything but esoteric. In their typology of brotherhoods, Colonial administrators and scholars had located the 'Isawiyya at the bottom in the hierarchy of Sufi *khouan*. During the above-mentioned procession, Doutté accurately noted that "the Qâdriyya and the T'ayyibiya" were also part of it. But he added that the 'Isawiyya's followers stepped aside to give way to

the two other groups, whose members regarded them contemptuously as a very rural *khouan* composed of people belonging to the lower classes.[18] The French ethnographer was not aware of the esoteric musical dimension of the 'Isawiyya's rituals, nor of the meaning of their use of a bestiary in their choreography,[19] nor of a color palette in their demonology, overdetermining their sophisticated understanding of states of trance. What colonial knowledge, as well as Arabic sources, completely failed to see here was not only a symbolic order, but a likely combination in a system of correspondences that would have paved the way for a fully esoteric reading of these rituals.

The Occultist Max Théon and his Qualified Perception of the Arab People and Religiosity

In *Un séjour chez les grands initiés* (A Stay Among the Great Initiates),[20] a book whose title clearly refers to the bestselling esoteric work published by Édouard Schuré in 1889, Claire Thémanlys, one of Théon's followers, evokes the first appearance of the "master" Max Théon in the landscape of Tlemcen, which she describes in a manner suffused with Orientalism.[21] Zarif, where the Théons settled, was a neighborhood where Arabs seemed to move freely—implicitly, more freely than in other areas shared with Western residents. Their reasons for entering the vicinity of Zarif were based on superstitious beliefs as well as the presence of the shrine of a *marabout* which they considered a pilgrimage place.[22] For Thémanlys, then, Muslim spirituality was connected not with Sufi spirituality but with the cult of saints, a religiosity which did not interact with Théon's one, and was considered lower in terms of hierarchy.

Thémanlys portrays Théon as a figure of authority whose mere presence was enough to end quarrels between Arab farm-workers.[23] Théon's supposedly extraordinary spiritual aura may in fact have been overshadowed by a more prosaic ability: his good command of Arabic. In front of his Arab audience, Théon gained the status of an arbiter of justice. This status was probably derived from the colonial situation and would probably have been denied a merely spiritual master in interactions with Western colonial settlers, interactions that seem to have been scarce.

The relationship between the Théons and the "native" people, who Thémanlys considers "still very child-like children,"[24] was that of masters granting love in exchange for respect. But the Théons were also objects of

veneration by Arabs from the neighborhood, who named Max "Marabout," clearly referring to his healing powers. Mira Alfassa (1878–1973), also known as "the Mother," a female collaborator of Sri Aurobindo who, at an early age, journeyed to Tlemcen in 1906–1907 in order to benefit from Théon's teachings, testifies to this role, pointing out that "prosperous Arab merchants" paid visits to Théon. Ignorant as they were, they did not understand his teachings, but were however very attracted to them.[25] Alfassa thus mentions an interaction with wealthy Tlemcenian Arabs which is omitted by Thémanlys, who preferred to focus on the humble Arab poor. Interestingly, this interaction switches roles, Théon becoming an exotic object of interest for the colonized elites. In doing so, Alfassa reverses the colonial hierarchy. But one may wonder here what kind of *marabout* Théon looked like to his followers. Pascal Thémanlys (Claire Thémanlys' son) provides an answer: *marabout*, an Arabic term for saint, is understood by him (and probably by the Théons as well) as a reference to "one of the brotherhoods of initiates that kept the antique tradition alive."[26]

According to Théon, the access of the local Muslim population to spirituality was through music and, for women, trance. For him, this was a very poor degree of medium-like consciousness, a limitation that is also mentioned in his critique of spirit mediums' activities. As for the men, their credulity led them to fall prey to superstition, as shown by the discovery of "blind fish" in the vicinity of Zarif. Some Arabs discovered that the fish in the water of one of the local caves were eyeless, a phenomenon they took for a miracle. Théon learned about these fish because water from the cave was used to fill the fountain on the grounds of his manor. He vigorously rejected the notion of a miracle. Instead, he considered the blindness of the fish to be a result of the darkness of the cave, providing a scientific explanation for what was considered an extraordinary phenomenon.

The sacred fish, widespread in Maghrebian Islam, are bound to the cult of saints, as noted by Emile Dermenghem.[27] As for the fish referred to by Théon, they may have been located in the source of Ain el-Hout and thus associated with the pilgrimage to the shrine of Abu Madyan, patron of Tlemcen. Théon's disparaging remarks on the miracle, as reported by Thémanlys, probably concealed his curiosity for the animal and nature cults that were so visible in the local popular religion.[28] Sacred fish, turtles, and jinn-snakes-like animals were also a matter of profound interest and esoteric research for Jean-Henri Probst-Biraben (1875–1957), an Orientalist who taught in the colonial *madrasa* of Constantine (but not in

Tlemcen's one) and also a Freemason, a Martinist, a Theosophist, and a Sufi who became deeply involved in the French esoteric milieu from the 1920s to the 1950s.[29]

The Tlemcen Masonic Lodge as a Local and Algerian Political Player

Xavier Yacono has noted that some French Masons who encountered Sufi brotherhoods in Algeria thought that another kind of Masonry had existed there before the French occupation.[30] Édouard de Neveu, a French Saint Simonian officer, in his seminal work on the *khouan* drew a superficial but interesting parallel with the Masonic lodges in terms of salutation, pointing out the apparent absence of any sacred word or password in the *khouan* rituals,[31] which he felt showed the non-verbal nature of Sufi esotericism in Algeria. Charles Brosselard, a sub-prefect in Tlemcen district and author of a later and less-known book on the *khouan*, disagreed with Neveu, arguing that the *khouan* identified one another with certain words taken from their rituals.[32] But he was in agreement with Neveu regarding the usefulness of the comparison, providing a new but questionable argument about the non-philanthropic nature of the *khouan*.[33]

French Masons were nevertheless very enthusiastic about the conquest of Algeria, which they saw as an opportunity to combine the "civilizing mission" (*mission civilisatrice*) of the French colonial empire with Freemasonry. They often adopted a paternalistic but benevolent attitude, similar to Théon's, toward local Jews and Muslims. Interestingly, the lodges, initially with large numbers of the French military, seem to have been more interested in attracting Muslims than Jews. Muslims were wild but brave, whereas the local Jews were considered backward and cowardly. The lodges also considered that attracting Jews might discourage the recruitment of Muslims.[34]

The Tlemcenian lodge, affiliated to the Grand Orient (like most lodges in Algeria), was often referred to as the Union de Tlemcen, which is actually not a lodge but the Mutual Help Society (Société de Secours Mutuel), the Masonic association that hosted the lodge, which was named Loge Saint Jean (St John's Lodge).[35] The Masonic archives provide details of the communities to which the members of the lodge belonged.[36] Local Jews or Muslims are almost absent, as are settlers of Italian or Spanish stock. So the lodge was from the beginning and for a long time composed

of, and ruled by, very French members, a situation that gradually changed slightly, as is shown by some newcomers.[37]

Le Courrier de Tlemcen, the main weekly newspaper, was the voice of the local Freemasons.[38] It provides information on the names and profiles of some high-ranking Freemasons, especially the *vénérable* masters, but above all, on the philanthropic activities of the lodge, particularly the traditional balls it organized to collect money for the destitute and for food for distribution to them. As for the other main local periodical, *La Tafna*, it too advertised the Masonic benevolent activities. From *Le Courrier de Tlemcen*, one learns that the Moorish-style reception hall opened for public events was adorned with "Masonic scripts, symbols and artefacts."[39] The building itself, situated on Almohades Street in the former Arab quarter, was a Moorish one according to the description given by the notary in charge of its adjudication.[40] In June 1907, the lodge moved to a new building, situated on the rue de la Paix,[41] a huge avenue laid down during the colonial planning of Tlemcen in the 1840s and traversing both new and old Tlemcen.

Unsurprisingly, almost nothing is said in *Le Courrier de Tlemcen* about the activities and interests that were closed to the public audience, although one learns, at least, about the lodge's perception of Spiritism and magnetism. Probably referring to the metropole, it reported in 1891 that magnetism and Spiritist experiences had recently been forbidden in magicians' performances.[42] Spiritism and magnetism seem to have been a matter of entertainment, enlivening the tours of the many prestidigitators hosted in Tlemcen. *La Tafna* is more ambivalent in its attitude to Spiritism, which it praises as a "science" but announces as the theme of a pantomime performance with tricks and magic.[43] As for alchemy, it is referred to in an advertisement for tonic pills.[44] According to the local newspapers, "occult sciences" were the monopoly of the magicians on their demonstration tours. Graham Jones has noted that state-sponsored tours by magicians started in Algeria in 1856 with the tour of the great Houdini, a campaign designed by the military colonial administration in order to debunk the prestige of *marabouts* and *khouans* using magic.[45]

As for Max Théon, he is presented as a "mysterious" person and mentioned several times in the local press, where he is identified not as an occultist but as a "Polish erudite" often nicknamed "the Russian," an interesting disclosure of his Eastern European origins.[46]

Examining the change in Freemasonry in France and Algeria at the time of the Dreyfus affair, André Combes has noted that, beside its

anti-clericalism, Freemasonry now showed a growing interest in Kabbalah, while scientism was stepping back.[47] But the Tlemcenian Freemasons did not seem to be giving up on their scientist dogma, consigning the "occult and psychic sciences" to entertainment. Kabbalah is not touched upon in *Le Courrier de Tlemcen*, but the uses of the adjective *cabalistic* are notable in articles, as they relate to modern magicians or are in Orientalist-like short novels. Thus a text entitled "Redidja" evokes the figure of a Jew living in Algiers and knowledgeable in "occult sciences."[48] When the weekly periodical devoted an article to the shrine of the most famous Kabbalist Rabbi of Tlemcen, Ephraim al-Naqwa, venerated by the local Jewry, the author, an Ashkenazi Jew who had settled in Tlemcen, presents him as a master in Talmudic literature and in "sacred knowledge" (*science sacrée*) and recounts the "legend" around his life, but mentions "cabalistic scripts" as being out of the realm of the intervention of this wonder-working rabbi.[49] Whatever the real interest of high-ranking local Freemasons in any kind of Kabbalah, their lodge does not seem to have been very open to the Jews.

The archives of the lodge report that a Jewish Mason, Judas Levy, was admitted in 1872, but he was not a Tlemcenian Jew, and probably not even Algerian. Aron Benichou, a Tlemcenian Jew and a member of the Grand Orient, joined the delegation of Algerian Jews that went to Versailles in order to persuade the monarchist French President of the Republic, Adolphe Thiers (1797–1877), not to revoke the Crémieux decree, which had given French citizenship to most Algerian Jews; but Benichou's name does not appear in the available archives of the Tlemcen lodge.

Whatever the later Jewish membership of the lodge, its political position at the beginning of the 1880s was less hostile than neutral toward Jews. In February 1881, elections for the city council occurred, with fourteen candidates. In the first round, prominent Freemasons (Gerard and Rulié) were not elected. They decided to withdraw and call for a vote in favor of three candidates, two of whom were Jewish. Meanwhile, on the other side, the four French settlers who were already elected called for a vote for three further candidates, two of whom were also Jewish. Besides illustrating the stance of some local Masons, the 1881 election shows how Jews were becoming involved in local politics and were eager to enter the local city council. In his bestselling book, *La France juive*, the famous antisemitic journalist Édouard Drumont (1844–1917) raised this specter, stressing that Jewified municipalities were forcing European settlers to accept Jews in their public meetings, balls, and charity fairs. Among

others, he briefly mentions an event that took place in Tlemcen in May 1883.[50] *Le Courrier de Tlemcen* echoes Drumont in a very detailed, but cautious way.[51]

The Société de la Musique Municipale (the Tlemcen Music Society), which was organizing a ball, excluded Jews from its invitation list. Mayor Tedeschi (elected after the controversial 1881 vote for the city council), rather embarrassed, opted for an intermediate solution, suggesting the Society invite just a few Jews, "among the most educated [*sic*] and honorable." In the face of near-unanimous refusal by the twenty-seven members of the Society, Tedeschi's attempt failed and he banned the event, which had been planned for 19 May 1883. A mob of young Tlemcenians went to the Jewish quarter to take revenge and "beat the Jews." Some Jews reacted fiercely to the attacks, and huge riots began, carrying on for three days. Seven Jews, two "Europeans," and three "natives" (*indigènes*) were arrested: a count that shows clearly both vigorous resistance by the Jews and the partial behavior of the local gendarmes.

In 1897, the Parti français (French Party) won the local elections in Tlemcen and gained control of the municipality. This was one among several local harbingers of the rise of an antisemitic momentum in Algeria. Édouard Drumont was elected member of parliament in Algiers in the general elections of May 1898. In the local elections in November 1898, the antisemitic activist and journalist Max Régis (1873–1950), head of an Anti-Jewish League, won the municipality of Algiers and then endorsed Drumont. French general Masonic lodges in Algeria were divided over the attitude to take to the subsequent removal of Régis from office. The Union de Tlemcen adopted a very ambiguous stance, against his removal and the sanctions taken against him, but not supporting his cause. Does this imply that relations between the Masonic lodge and Jews in Tlemcen were tense enough to prevent any substantial integration of the latter? This question is rather difficult to answer through the sole prism of *Le Courrier de Tlemcen*, but the change in the newspaper's evaluation of Drumont's ideas is striking. In 1886, his book had been promoted enthusiastically advertised.[52] In 1893, on the eve of the national elections, repeated attacks on the former MPs elected in Algeria made by the "antisemitic" Drumont and his followers were labeled "nuts" by *Le Courrier*, signaling the newspaper's clear dissociation from the Drumont camp.[53] Without any doubt, antisemitism was strong in Tlemcen, as shown by the events of May 1883; but the growing participation by Jews in public and civic life in Algeria after the Crémieux decree, as well as the steady merging

of anti-Masonic and antisemitic discourses, forced Freemasonry to give its republicanism a non-antisemitic color. Mayor Tedeschi explained in May 1883 that banning Jews from local meetings was incompatible with tolerance. This cardinal Masonic virtue led the Masons to tolerance toward the Jews, if not to philosemitism.[54]

In 1903, *Le Courrier de Tlemcen* published on its front page a long article taken from a republican French provincial newspaper relating the visit to Fez of the Orientalist Auguste Mouliéras (1855–1931), a native of Tlemcen who had learned Arabic in his childhood.[55] Historically, Tlemcen was strongly connected to Fez, as to other Moroccan locations, and the French colonization had not entirely cut these ties. The article reports on a visit by Mouliéras to the chief rabbi of Fez, criticizing his polygamy, which it presents as a widespread habit in the Jewish quarter. Then comes a generalization about all Maghrebian Jewry, which is accused of being "Islamized," that is, of being morally vicious and superstitious in its beliefs (the cult of saints). In addition, its rabbis are criticized for the making and use of amulets. This accusation fits perfectly with the perception of uncivilized Tlemcenian Jews mentioned above. However, the target here is not specifically Jewry, but explicitly the popular religion in all three Abrahamic religions, the cult of Our Lady of Lourdes being put into the same pot with its equivalents in Islam and Judaism.

As for possible connections between Freemasons and the Jewish Kabbalistic tradition, I came across no evidence of even the slightest interest in Kabbalah, whatever its content or orientation.

The Local Jewish Community Facing its Kabbalistic Legacy

The tombstones of the most famous Tlemcenian Kabbalists and miracle-workers—Ephraim al-Naqwa and, to a lesser extent, Joseph al-Ashqar (1465–1540)[56]—were the objects of popular devotion among the Jews of Tlemcen, and also among the Muslims. This is not surprising, as some local Muslim saints who had also originated from al-Andalus, including Abu al-Madyan, the patron of Tlemcen, were revered by the Jews as well as Muslims. In Ephraim al-Naqwa's case, devotion included a biannual pilgrimage in fall and spring, the latter attracting Jews from beyond the Tlemcen region.

The conquest of Tlemcen by the French army in 1842 did not entirely save local Jews from persecution,[57] a pogrom launched by Muslims targeting them in 1846. However, the local community was provided with a consistory (*consistoire*, a representative body under French law). In 1849, Rabbi Ephraim al-Naqwa's tomb was rebuilt with a new tombstone and inscription,[58] and the synagogue he founded was restored and enlarged in 1875 and 1890.[59] Symbolically, the restoration mobilized the tutelary figure of a rabbi whose performative efficacy had been recognized for centuries.

Kabbalah flourished in Tlemcen with the arrival of Jews fleeing the Christian Reconquista of Spain between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[60] The first wave came after the Toledo massacres in 1391. After 1236 and the collapse of the Almohad caliphate, Tlemcen became the capital of a kingdom founded by a Berber dynasty, the Zayyanids. This kingdom, situated on the trans-Saharan route to Timbuktu, closely connected to Morocco and leading through the coastal city of Oran to the Mediterranean ports, turned Tlemcen into a prosperous city and a rich cultural center, and the Zayyanid dynasty became a refuge for both Muslims and Jews from the Iberian peninsula. One figure, mentioned above, epitomizes the communal fate of exiled Jews (the *megorachim*): Rabbi Ephraim ben Israel al-Naqwa (1359–1442), a physician and presumed Kabbalist who gained enough confidence from the rulers of Tlemcen to ensure that the Jews were no longer relegated to the outskirts of Tlemcen but allowed within its walls, where they built a Jewish quarter. The *megorachim* were not really welcomed by local Jews in Tlemcen, however. This might be the reason why the role played by al-Naqwa in the settlement within Tlemcen, adorned with legendary elements, testifies to the contribution of newcomers to Tlemcenian Jewry.

Despite persecution by some Sufi brotherhoods in 1467, Tlemcen was considered safe enough to receive a new wave of refugees from Spain after 1492, often via Fez in Morocco. Rabbi Judah Khalaz (d. 1537), born in Castile around 1440, fled to Muslim Andalusia before crossing the sea and reaching Tlemcen directly, without passing through Morocco. His Kabbalah background is evidenced by his work *Sefer ha-Musar*, which deals with ethics but provides Kabbalistic insights. The book is an adaptation of a work by Ephraim al-Naqwa's father, Israel al-Naqwa, as well as an interpretation of Kabbalistic explanations for commandments and prayers by a relative of Judah Khalaz. These entangled connections show the importance and heritage of family networks, family alliances, and Castilian

Kabbalist milieus. Ephraim al-Naqwa shared an additional feature with Judah Khalaz: their attachment to Maimonides' teachings and views, against the followers of Nachmanides, another famous Iberian Kabbalist.[61] That antagonism questions the consistency of the Iberian Kabbalist community and suggests that inner struggles between groups may have continued in North Africa, adding to oppositions between indigenous groups and immigrants from Spain.[62]

Among the other newcomers from Spain, one finds such famous Kabbalists as Rabbi Jacob Berab (1474–1541) and Abraham ben Jacob Saba (1440–1508).[63] They stayed for a while in Tlemcen, before continuing on their way: Saba went to Verona in Italy, where he died, and Berab's journey ended in Safed, in Ottoman Palestine. Safed was at the time a destination for many Kabbalists from Spain,[64] which made it a unique setting for the development of Kabbalah. As for Tlemcen, it was under pressure both from the Ottoman empire and the Kingdom of Spain during the first part of the sixteenth century, when both were persecuting local Jews.

The fall of the Zayyanid kingdom in 1555 had a very negative effect on Tlemcen, which completely lost its economic and cultural role as a regional center. However, for the Kabbalists based in Algeria, it unified the space and allowed an easier circulation within Ottoman borders, improving connections with places like Safed, Adrianople, Salonica, and Constantinople but reducing relations with Morocco, which was beyond the Ottoman realm. Rabbi Joseph al-Ashqar, born in Seville and also coming through Morocco, represents a different trajectory because of his stay in Tlemcen, where he opened a Talmudic school and wrote many treatises. Among them, one finds a Kabbalistic treatise, completed in 1529.[65] Al-Ashqar was, as noted by Moshe Idel, an exception among Kabbalists because of his birthplace in Muslim Andalusia.[66] The others originated from the lands of the Reconquista. However, after 1492 Tlemcen and North Africa hosted both Muslims and Jews, a common fate which considerably helped the integration of the Jews. As well shown by al-Ashqar's case, Kabbalist rabbis who settled in or passed through Tlemcen were given many other tasks, such as being Talmudists, communal leaders, and sometimes miracle-workers; their deep interest in Kabbalah was not exclusive. The *Zohar*, the masterpiece of the Kabbalah corpus, written in Spain, was not only studied but probably also taught in Tlemcen. However, it is difficult to see to what extent Tlemcen later preserved its role as a center for Kabbalists. Again, a biographical approach may provide some hints: Rabbi Jacob Sasportas (1610–1698), born in Oran, spent twenty years as a judge in the religious

court (*dayan*) in Tlemcen before leaving for Marrakech, Fez and Salé in Morocco, then traveling to England and settling in Hamburg and, eventually, Amsterdam.[67]

As shown by Sasportas' life, the Jews, their rabbis, and especially the Kabbalists were still circulating far beyond Ottoman Algeria. But the great challenge for Sasporta was to fight the spread of the Sabbateanist movement in North Africa, especially among Moroccan Jewry. Being himself a Kabbalist, Sasportas not only rejected Sabbatai Zevi's doctrine (also embedded in and inspired by Kabbalah) and his claim to be the Messiah, but also took his defenders for ignorant charlatans, wondering why some very literate rabbis were following such a path.

The last notable figure one could refer to among these Kabbalists is Abraham ben Mordecai al-Naqwa (1810–1890).[68] This al-Naqwa was a follower of the Lurianic Kabbalah school. Born in Salé, he spent only three years in Tlemcen, but opened a Talmudic center there, and traveled in Algeria (Oran) and Morocco to collect manuscripts. He traveled twice to Livorno, which was in those times, like Venice, a place where books could easily be printed in Hebrew. There he published in 1852 a book including a manuscript by Judah Khalaz commenting on a book about ritual laws by Maimonides. After Abraham al-Naqwa there is no evidence of the continuation of Kabbalist activities in Tlemcen. Yet his concern with the preservation of available manuscripts may point to a local tradition existing after his death, a less creative period when Kabbalistic works were objects of patrimonialization and veneration, giving the *Zohar*, possession of which was enough to ensure protection, the status of a sacred and holy book.[69] The *Zohar* was not only studied but also recited or chanted, a feature shared by Jewry from Morocco to Safed, as well as in Europe, where ritualistic recitation of the Zohar became widespread after the seventeenth century.[70]

Traditionally known for its Muslim and Jewish scholars, Tlemcen, like other North African Jewish centers, was a place to copy manuscripts, and that occupation was the very task of the rabbis. Indeed, it was a common feature among North African rabbis to be circumciser, butcher, and copyist.

In his analysis of the major steps in the reception of the *Zohar*, Boaz Huss underlines that, until the first editions of the *Zohar* in Italy and Salonica in the second part of the sixteenth century, the corpus of the book was not fixed and therefore its canonization not carried out. He describes this period as that of the copyists, whose activity gave them a

powerful position shared with the owners of the manuscripts. This feature was initially widespread in North Africa, making the *Zohar* a sacred book that was authoritative but also influential in rituals and liturgy. In Europe, this role in religious practices developed much later, and went together with a popularization of the *Zohar* that occurred only in the eighteenth century, with anthologies and translations.

It is difficult to say to what extent these copies were preserved despite the many pogroms against local Jewry in Tlemcen. In 1846, Abbé Bargès (1810–1896), a Hebrew professor at the Sorbonne, visited Tlemcen for the second time to collect ancient books in Hebrew and in Arabic. His Jewish host, named [Sidi] Samuel, while showing him the few books kept at home, added that he would not find any manuscript in Tlemcen, but that in the Jewish cemetery there were many Roman inscriptions to read.[71] Bargès' host might have been avoiding the question of access to books, but pointing to the cemetery where Ephraim al-Naqwa's tomb was located as the place keeping "alive" the memory and the teachings of local Judaism was not at all a mistake.

At the end of 1914, three postcards published in Tlemcen depict the traditional ceremony (identified as *Gemilut Hassadim*)[72] for the burial of old, damaged books and writings in Hebrew. The ceremony was performed with prayers in the Jewish cemetery. It seems to have been important enough at the time to merit recording, the remaining postcards bearing testimony to its communal benefit (with distributions of food to those in need) and the whole ceremony being conducted by the local society, Hebrat Gemilut Hassadim.[73] One may assume that old Kabbalistic writings were also periodically buried in such a way in Tlemcen's Jewish cemetery.

Whatever the preservation of manuscripts and copies, Tlemcen does not seem to have been a historical center for printing books, an activity reserved to Italian or Ottoman towns that were the final destinations of the Kabbalists passing through Tlemcen. Moreover, skipping the printing stage, local uses of Kabbalah probably jumped from the copyist era to an early ritualization that may even have involved daily life, a trajectory implicitly summed up as "living Kabbalah" by today's rabbis who claim to represent this North African tradition.

Legends of Moses in Tlemcen: The Reason Behind Théon's Presence?

None of the sources that deal with Théon's life and doctrine give the reason why he chose, in 1887, to settle in such a remote place as Tlemcen, or why he stayed there until his death in 1927. Even though his origins were never publicly disclosed, Max Théon, also known as Eliezer Mordechai and as Maximillian Louis Bimstein, was a Polish Jew. Born between 1848 and 1850 in Warsaw, he might have received a Hasidic Kabbalistic education at the age of eighteen, although this is contested.[74] His move to Tlemcen might have had something to do with the local Kabbalistic tradition, but there is absolutely nothing in the literature on or by Théon that could support this interpretation: in the books penned by his followers there are few mentions of any contact with Tlemcenian Jews,[75] any visit to local Kabbalists, or consultation of Kabbalistic manuscripts which might still have been kept in the local Jewish community. On the contrary, Théon seemed eager to avoid any local doctrinal or esoteric affiliation. Yet this perception must be corrected in two ways.

In a local newspaper issued by the Jewish community, *Le Petit Tlemcenien*, a short obituary was published a few days after Théon's burial on 4 March 1927. Surprisingly enough, it dwells on the fact that the funerals were followed by the chief rabbi of Tlemcen and communal notables. Then the obituary provides an interesting detail explaining that Théon, referred to here by his official first names and surname (Louis Maximilian Bimstein), had for a long time lived secluded in his mansion, and "behind a mysterious appearance, was hiding a great tenderness, made of compassion towards the poor Jews."[76] The obituary implicitly reported that Théon himself was discreetly helping people in need.

There is a second reason that might explain Théon's settling in Tlemcen. This relates to a legend of the presumed burial of the Prophet Moses in Tlemcen.[77] The tradition associating Moses with Tlemcen was well known among local Jewry and Muslims. According to Marc Semenoff, Théon, in his writings, would have stressed that the real teachings of Moses are still to be disclosed.[78]

Moses has been also referred to analogically in the legend of Rabbi al-Naqwa's settling in Tlemcen in an episode concerning a stone touched with a palm by the rabbi, from which water then gushed out.[79] In his 1859 book on Tlemcen, Abbé Bargès noted that Arabic sources identified Tlemcen with a town where, according to the Quran (Surah 18, verse 76),

al-Khidr (here referred as the "unknown"), accompanied by Moses, fixed a wall that was crumbling down. As for Abu Madyan, the patron saint of Tlemcen, he was named after the Madianites. His surname, Shu'ayb, is used in the Quran for Jethro, the priest of the Madianites who hosted Moses and became his father-in-law. Thus despite their Iberian origin, the Sufi Abu Madyan and the Rabbi Ephraim al-Naqwa, leaning on identifications with biblical and Quranic figures, may have re-enacted the meeting and the alliance between Moses and Jethro in the local imagination of Tlemcenians. In addition, the figure of Joshua also seems to have been revered in the area, as shown by the shrine of a local saint, Sidna (or Sidi) Yusha(a), situated in the province of Tlemcen, Yusha being here the Arabic equivalent of Joshua. The shrine was visited both by Muslims and Jews.

Whatever Théon's motivation, his journey to and residence in Tlemcen repeated *mutatis mutandis* the journey of earlier rabbis who had left European soil for North Africa in order to preserve a tradition and make it live and flourish once again. Théon apparently avoided both praising Tlemcenian Judaism for its spiritual or esoteric contribution and denigrating it for its popular devotion to beloved rabbis—a restraint that he refrained from exercising, according to Thémanlys (above), in the case of Muslim spirituality and popular religion.

A Civilizing Mission Applied to the Local Jewry

At the time Théon and his wife settled in Zarif, the Jewish community of Tlemcen was considered backward not only by the local Masonic lodge and by French settlers in general, but also by the Israelite Consistory of France, which internalized the discourse of the "civilizing mission" with the blessing of French colonial administration.[80] In a very colonial manner, chief rabbis (often from Alsace) were systematically sent by the Israelite Consistory of France to Tlemcen to rule the local community. Their patronizing attitude toward, and deprecating perceptions of, local Jews made relations difficult. Rabbi Abraham Meir [Meyer], sent from France to Tlemcen in 1890, embodied this discourse to such an extent (arguing that Tlemcenian Jews never benefited from the Crémieux decree because of their backwardness) that he was removed in 1902 after a campaign by the local Jewish authorities and population. The Tlemcenian rabbi Haïm Bliah (1832–1919) complained from 1890 onwards about Meir, whom he considered both "incompetent and ignorant."[81] According to the French Rosicrucian Paul Vuillaud (1875–1950), Rabbi Meir was

arguing that "the author of the *Zohar* might be no other than the 'adventurer' [*sic*] Abulafia," an assumption that attests both Meir's perception of Kabbalah and, implicitly, his negative views of the Tlemcenian community.[82]

It is unclear how much the local tradition of Kabbalah was troubled by this antagonism during the second part of the nineteenth century. Local rabbis kept alive the memory of Tlemcenian Judaism by writing down the history of its most popular figures, who were often known as great Kabbalists as well. This writing occurred at a time when pilgrimage to the shrine of Ephraim al-Naqwa was increasing in an unprecedented way.

One might assume that the local defense of Kabbalistic heritage and of the indigenous Jewish tradition were somehow intertwined. But one needs to be cautious. Chief Rabbi Moise Weil, originally from Alsace and head of the Tlemcenian community between 1877 and 1882, then Grand Rabbi of Algiers in 1891, fought local rabbis like Bliah, preventing them from being appointed to any important local positions in the long and even medium term.[83] Bliah, who deputized in the local rabbinical position from 1883 to 1890, was not appointed to the full position despite the support of local consistory institutions in Oran and Tlemcen. He never gave up traditional Tlemcenian dress. In 1902 he published Ephraim al-Naqwa's work, *Sefer Chaar Kevod Hachem*, in Tunis. In order to do so, he had to travel to the University of Oxford to get a copy of the manuscript, which was not available in Tlemcen.

Despite his Alsatian origins, Weil was known for having a good command of Arabic. His deep involvement in Algerian affairs, noted Simon Schwarzfuchs, turned him into a staunch defender of local communities.[84] He worked on a book by another Tlemcenian Kabbalist, Judah Khalaz, who was buried in the Tlemcen cemetery in 1500.[85] The manuscript Weil discovered in Tlemcen, entitled *Meshiah Ilmim*, was a commentary on the Pentateuch commentary of Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Itzhaki, 1040–1105). In addition, among other works he published in 1881 a short piece devoted to the old Jewish cemetery in Tlemcen.[86] The booklet was mainly centered on the "pride," "strength," "crown," and "miracle-worker" of Tlemcenian Jewry: Ephraim al-Naqwa.[87] Though a follower of the critical *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, as noted by Paul Fenton,[88] Weil regarded the legend around al-Naqwa with a kind of empathic indulgence, concluding that "Legend seizes the biography of all prestigious men."[89] He had to concede, however, that the gift of miracle-worker, a gift that outlived al-Naqwa, was acknowledged even by enlightened men who did not accept

superstition while visiting his tomb.[90] If some visitors became mystically lost in devotion, that was only because of the respect he deserved. Weil adds: "These people are mostly women."

The portraits sketched above may perhaps give the feeling of a contradiction between the roles of Bliah, the conservative, and Weil, the modern and secular rabbi. Weil was known for strict piety and Bliah for flexibility in the enforcement of religious rules when they conflicted with some unavoidable aspects of modern life. Finally, Weil was known for his keen interest in Kabbalah, a focus attested to by his library. While Bliah was celebrating the memory of the most "iconic" rabbi, a task that took him to England, Weil preferred to exhume Khalaz' manuscript in Tlemcen. The two rabbis combined dynamics made the classical Tlemcen a noteworthy place for Kabbalah: circulation of wise men and the preservation of texts.

In her analysis of Ephraim al-Naqwa's *Sefer Chaar Kevod Hachem*, based on the manuscript unearthed from the Bodleian Library by Bliah and published in 1902, Colette Sırat expressed her perplexity at the rabbi's reputation as a Kabbalist and miracle-worker.[91] According to Sırat, the contents of the manuscript—a defense of Maimonides and his theory of prophecy against the criticism of Nachmanides (1194–1270) and his disciples—evidenced that al-Naqwa was a rationalist philosopher and not at all a Kabbalist. Nachmanides' harsh critiques of Maimonides' explanations of the *Onkelos Targum* (the Aramaic translation of the Pentateuch) rest on a Kabbalistic exegesis that is not supported by philology. Ultimately, Sırat based her main argument on the non-Kabbalistic way in which al-Naqwa uses the terms *sefirot* and *middot*. Without coming to a conclusion on Sırat's arguments, one may first note that affiliation with Maimonides' ideas and respect for him was very common among Castilian Kabbalists. Besides, to base our judgment on the sole opus preserved among the presumed numerous writings of Ephraim al-Naqwa might be problematic. Finally, even though the Rab of Tlemcen does not in this respect fit with his own legend, this was not a major issue for fin-de-siècle rabbis in Tlemcen such as Weil or Bliah, who paid respect to this venerated local figure and accepted him as a Jewish saint, or for other past Kabbalists in Tlemcen. That was undoubtedly Haïm Bliah's main purpose when he decided to publish al-Naqwa's work.

The French Kardecian School of Spiritism in Algeria

The origins of Spiritism in French Algeria go back to the 1860s. It seems to have exclusively touched French and, to a lesser extent, other European settlers (Spanish and Italians). Evidence for the long period of prosperity of Spiritism in colonial Algeria can be found in *La vie future: Revue psychologique de l'Afrique du nord* (The Future Life: Psychological Journal of North Africa), a local periodical published from 1906 to 1914. In this periodical, as in other Spiritist periodicals published in Paris such as *La revue spirite* (The Spiritist Review), there is no mention of any Jew or Muslim involved in Algerian Spiritism beyond the Muslim servants working for colonial masters and, supposedly, not guided by their own free will.

In 1863, Monseigneur Pavy, Archbishop of Algiers, explained that, in his diocese, Spiritism had touched the main urban areas, whereas the small towns and the countryside were safe from it.[92] Clerical observers saw Spiritism as an urbanization of superstition in Algeria. According to French colonial observers of local Judaism and Islam, superstition was also noteworthy in the popular religion in the shape of *marabouts*, Kabbalists, and Sufi brotherhoods, something that was especially noted in Tlemcen. Edmond Doutté, one of the colonial scholars who reframed the interpretation of Algerian Islam, noted in his *Note sur l'Islam maghribin. Les marabouts* (Note on North African Islam: the *marabouts*) that the forms taken by Jewish and Muslim devotion to the saints had influenced each other. According to Doutté, Sadi Yacoub, a famous Muslim saint, had been appropriated by the local Jews, who considered him a Jewish saint. His shrine, added Doutté, was visited by Jewish ladies, dressed for the occasion like Arab women.[93]

Kardecian Spiritism Facing the 'Isawiyya

Trumbull has analyzed how colonial authority, with the help of scholars such as Doutté, constructed the performances of the 'Isawiyya as an exotic and touristic object, akin to Indian "fakirism." The international exhibition of 1867 brought these Tlemcenian "fakirs" to Paris, exhibited, among other venues, in the Champs de Mars theater and the "athletic arena" on the rue Le Peletier. Allan Kardec (1804–1869), the founder of the French school of Spiritism, attended one of their shows. In his periodical, *La revue spirite*, he gave an account more mesmerized than those provided by the French newspapers.[94] Impressed by the performance and convinced it was

not fraudulent, Kardec did not accept comparisons between the 'Isawiyya and illusionists or charlatans. Nor was he pleased with another parallel drawn between this "Arab tribe" [*sic*] and the eighteenth-century Christian sect of the Convulsionaries of Saint-Médard. The performances of the 'Isawiyya were, according to Kardec, "effects without cause" still awaiting a scientific investigation that spiritism might provide. He was reiterating the argument given by the *Journal du magnétisme* in 1854 and 1857, but with a less anti-clerical tone.[95] Graham Jones has underlined that French esoteric movements differed markedly from the colonial perceptions that presented "Algerian Muslims as irrational fanatics" or as charlatans, preferring to stress "the undiscovered potential of occult powers."[96]

To better understand Kardec's views and this slight difference between magnetism and Spiritism, one has to remember that, in France, Kardecian Spiritism was addressed, among others, to disillusioned Catholics. It was imbued with a progressive civilizing ideology compatible with that of colonial rulers and Freemasonry, considering superstitions a mark of backwardness. The presumed negative perception of Spiritism by Freemasons, as displayed in *Le Courrier de Tlemcen*, indicates that this view was not reciprocal. But what is interesting here is the ambivalence of Spiritism in the face of colonial discourse. Followers of Kardec both supported the French civilizing mission in Algeria and distanced themselves from the official position disparaging the Muslim saints and debunking the tricks of the local fakirs. Thus by analogy the Spiritists kept in mind that their own mediums had been accused of fraud and seen as less convincing than prestidigitators touring in Algeria.

It seems that Tlemcen did host Spiritist group(s), even an association, for a while, but we lack substantial information regarding size and duration.[97] There is no evidence of any local connection between Masonic and Spiritist networks. One of the reasons for the absence of such connections might be gender division. Masonry was a purely male sociability,[98] whereas Spiritism was, in Algeria as in other places, open to both males and females. In a book published in Paris in 1870, an Algerian Spiritist condemns polygamy, forced marriage, and excessive numbers of births, eventually advocating the liberation of women by Spiritism.[99] In order to claim indigenous support for his cause, the narrator relates his meeting and talks with Sy Taïeb ben Ali, a (fictional?) young rural notable living in the countryside near Algiers, to whom he is introduced by Monsieur Robert, a French Spiritist settled in Algiers. Taïeb is said to have been trained in France, where he became acquainted with Spiritism through his interest in Charles

Fourier's utopian socialism. Narrating an event he has witnessed, Taïeb explains how the cult of saints could be used among local Muslims to internalize awareness of women's rights: through a young male descendant, the spirit and voice of Lalla Kheira, a female saint, addressed the audience of visitors to her shrine.[100] Explicitly, Taïeb considers the experience to be a mediumnic call on spirit. In another chapter, the narrator visits the shrine of Sidi Mansur, a *marabout* educated in Tlemcen who traveled the world and married three times yet practiced monogamy, treating his wives with respect. At the tomb, Taïeb delivers a speech about life of the *marabout*.[101]

La revue spirite welcomed the publication of this anonymous work, and unveiled the identity of its author: Ferdinand Hugonnet, author of *Souvenirs d'un chef d'un bureau arabe* (1858).[102] Hugonnet was a military officer who served in Algeria in the 1840s, then settled in Oran.

Whatever the fictional dimension of this work, published in 1870, the author's real audience was not the Muslims, but a French readership interested in colonial debates, most probably readers from the metropole. Julia Clancy-Smith has reminded us that the control of Arab women was not initially a goal of the French colonial administration. In 1870, however, a civilian administration took the place of the military one, and developed a rhetoric fighting against the presumed oppression of women by Islamic laws and customs. In parallel, visual representations of Oriental woman became more and more eroticized. As for the modernized Muslim elites, they were calling for a social reform that would emancipate Arab women.[103]

Théon's Grievance Toward Spiritism

At the end of the 1890s, Théon had been a regular contributor to, and was presented as "one of the main collaborators" of, the *Journal du magnétisme et de la psychologie* (Journal of Magnetism and Psychology), founded by the French occultist and magnetist, Hector Durville. His critical assessments of Spiritism were published here and in the form of two pamphlets, "La doctrine spirite et l'oeuvre d'Allan Kardec" and "Spiritisme experimental."[104] Théon's first and main disagreement with Kardec's doctrine was that he regarded Spiritism as completely devoid of any real esoteric narrative of origins. Théon considered that the founder of the main French school of Spiritism was not at all interested in mythological narratives beyond references to the Gospels and the Old Testament, and did not care about a primordial humanity before Adam. Théon was also

concerned at the absence of hierarchy within the Spiritist movement, which he termed "communist." Implicitly, Théon was accusing Spiritists of not being esoteric or elitist enough in their approach to knowledge and praxis. One may conclude from these harsh attacks, as well as from the content of Théon's own doctrine, that he broke with these circles. But one needs to add that, while opposing Spiritism, Théon conducted séances in his mansion, as attested by the diary of his secretary, Teresa.[105] His medium was his own wife, gifted also with telekinetic powers.

It seems that the three imported esoteric models in Tlemcen—Spiritists, Masons, and Théon's Cosmic Movement—did not mix or even enter into dialog with each other. Besides competition, the reason for this mutual indifference is probably to be found in the broader mindset produced by the colonial context.

Once, in 1891, Théon contributes a very personal text to *Le Courrier de Tlemcen*.[106] Speaking in the first person, he presents himself during one of his night walks along the road near his mansion in Zarif. Then he narrates his encounter and dialog with a small fairy, hidden in a yellow jasmine flower. The fairy shares with him her wish "to be useful to humankind" in curing demonic fever with the root of the jasmine flower. On another occasion after this meeting, Théon again hears the voice of the fairy, who tells him of her attempts to spread a recipe for jasmine root as a curative decoction. Unfortunately, confesses the fairy, the wealthy and learned are too busy with their business and science to listen to her, while the poor are too obsessed by their struggle to survive. Thus the fairy is forced to cure by her own agency, which she does successfully. She disappears when a whistling locomotive bursts onto the scene. Théon concludes: "What I narrated might be a dream, but dreams are often truer than they seem."[107]

Théon's short tale might be read as a critique of a disenchantment with the so-called civilized world promoted by colonial rule. Such a grievance would have found favor with the audience of *Le Courrier de Tlemcen*, if not with those Jews and Arabs living in the cult of saints and miracle-working rabbis. However, while describing the jasmine root, Théon enriches it accurately with scientific elements and Latin names. Thus he attempts to win over those who, like Freemasons or, broadly speaking, scientist communal elites, were seeking refuge in a self-proclaimed benevolence.

Conclusion

The Tlemcen experience epitomizes some aspects of a religious substratum shared by North African Judaism and Islam—the cult of saints, dead or alive; the importance of "popular religion" and of the Sufi brotherhoods, as opposed to more formal institutions—that also shaped a local tradition of esotericism. This substratum was impacted in an ambivalent way by colonial rule. The destruction of more formal religious institutions and, especially, the rise of the paradigm of the "civilizing mission" left plenty of room for local esoteric groups, even though, in colonial eyes, they became a folklorized version of esotericism, combined with superstitions. Colonial rule thus created both protection and a new vulnerability. Arabic as a shared language, the preservation of the shared cult of saints, and communal resistance to "civilizing" institutions became the main tools on which local esoteric groups relied in order to survive.

The three imported esoteric models—the Freemasons, the Spiritists, and Théon—reacted in very ambiguous manner to the indigenous esoteric groups. They defined themselves in such exclusive and superior terms that dialog with the autochthonous groups was impossible. Science and the rational mind, both infatuated with the idea of a civilizing mission, as well as antisemitism, islamophobia, and racism, were the very colonial tools that they mobilized, together with a narrow definition of esotericism as distinct from and opposed to mysticism and popular religion. This considerably limited the role of the parallels they initially drew with local phenomena: of Théon as a *marabout*, of the *khouan* as a local Freemasonry, and of Spiritist interest in the 'Isawiyya or in the cult of saints. Linked for the most part to the French metropole, urbanized Freemasons and Spiritists missed the opportunity to put locality at the center of a rooting strategy that would have definitively associated them with local figures. In this regard, Théon was perhaps more successful.

One of the main leitmotifs activated in the colonial context was the discourse on the necessary emancipation of women. The Spiritists, Théon's unique medium, his wife, female followers of the 'Isawiyya, and Jewish ladies as leading elements in the veneration of Kabbalist rabbis—all were protagonists connecting the practices of indigenous and imported esoteric groups, mainly through trance as performance. To recognize their role would be possible, if it could be distanced from colonial narratives of the emancipation of Algerian woman, in other words kept at a distance from the civilizing mission discourse.

Notes

1. Erik Reenberd Sand, "The Marriage between the Theosophical Society and the Arya Samaj," in Tim Rudbog and Erik Sand (eds.) *Imagine the East. The Early Theosophical Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 229–248.
2. See Marco Deyasi, "Community without Borders: Symbolism, Theosophy and Anti-colonialism in France, c.1890," a talk within the frame of the Colloquium Series, *Turning of the Wheel*, University of Idaho (2011–2012) October 4, 2011. https://vivo.nkn.uidaho.edu/vivo/display/n63195.
3. Gauri Wiswanathan, "Spectrality's secret sharers: Occultism as (post) colonial effort," in Walter Goebel and Saskia Schabio (eds.) *Beyond the Black Atlantic: Relocating modernisation and technology* (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), 135.
4. See Michel Levallois and Sarga Moussa, *L'orientalisme des saints-simoniens* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2006).
5. For all these urban and demographic transformations, see Djilali Sari, *Tlemcen face à l'occupation coloniale* (Algiers: Casbah Editions, 2011), 19–76; Xavier Malverti and Aleth Picard, *Les villes coloniales fondées entre 1830 et 1880 en Algérie* (Paris: Ecole d'architecture de Grenoble/AGRA, 1988), 12–19.
6. For the figures related to the district, see Paul Meuriot, "Population et populations de l'Algérie," *Journal de la société statistique de Paris* 55 (1914): 239–251.
7. See Christian Chanel, John P. Deveney and Joscelyn Godwin, *La Fraternité Hermétique de Louxor (H.B. of L.). Rituels et instructions d'occultisme pratique* (Paris: Devry, 2000), an updated French edition of the first English edition of 1995.
8. Houari Touati explains that, in the weavers' milieu of nineteenth century Tlemcen, the transmission of knowledge between masters and apprentices was based on an esoteric pattern, with its rituals and myths. See Houari Touati, "Artisans tlemcéniens. XIXe–XXe siècles. La marche des tisserands vers le prolétariat," *Cahiers de la méditerranée* 7 (1983): 45–57.
9. As for the French section of the Theosophical Society, there is no evidence of followers in Tlemcen. Besides individual interest developed by such figures as the socialist journalist Louis Dramard (1849–1888), author of *La science occulte, étude de la doctrine ésotérique* (1884), and the orientalist and Arabist Albert Lentin (1884–1973), who became a member between 1917 and 1939, and some anonymous followers of Blavatsky's works, branches were set up in the 1900s in Oran (1) and Algiers (3). Like Freemasonry, the Society was banned by the Vichy regime in 1940/1941. According to a list of prominent members of

Freemasonry and the Theosophical Society, new Theosophical branches popped up in the interwar period in Algiers (3 or 4 branches) and Oran (2), and also in Constantine (1). The names listed evidenced the role of French and European settlers. See Marie-José Delalande, "Le mouvement théosophique en France. 1876–1921" (PhD diss., Université du Maine, May 2007), 93, 303, 385, 432 and 481. For the list made after the names issued in the *Journal Officiel de l'Etat français* in 1941, see http://www.entreprises-coloniales.fr/afrique-du-nord/Francmacs-JOEF-Algerie.pdf.

10. Pierre Vermeren, *La France en terre d'Islam, Empire colonial et religions XIXe–XXe siècles* (Paris: Belin, 2016), 165–180.
11. Mouloud Haddad, "Les maîtres de l'Heure. Soufisme et eschatologie en Algérie coloniale (1845–1901)," *Revue d'histoire du XIX^e siècle* 41, no 2 (2010): 49–61. Examples given by Mouloud do not concern Tlemcen's area.
12. The goal of these colonial *madrasas* was initially to train "indigenous" people for the administration of Islamic religion and justice, and for public education. Teachings were given by Muslims in Arabic until 1883. From this year on, the *madrasas* hosted French teachers too; French language and some mathematics, history, and geography appeared in the curricula. After the arrival of French teachers, Tlemcen's *madrasa* became steadily a center for French Orientalism in Algeria.
13. George R. Trumbull IV, *An Empire of facts: Colonial Power, Cultural Knowledge, and Islam in Algeria. 1870–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 101.
14. Edmond Doutté, *Les Aïssâoua à Tlemcen* (Châlons-sur-Marne: Imp. Martin Frères, 1900).
15. For an epistemic analysis on Doutté's work on the 'Isawiyya, see Trumbull, *Empire of Facts*, 131–144.
16. For a study of this esoteric symbolism in the Moroccan context, see Mehdi Nabti, *Les Aïssâwa. Soufisme, musiques et rituels de transe au Maroc* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010).
17. Doutté, *Aïssâoua*, 13.
18. Doutté, *Aïssâoua*, 33–34.
19. Imitations of camel, panther, or jackal. Doutté, *Aïssâoua*, 7.
20. Claire Thémanlys, *Un séjour chez les grands initiés* (Paris: Publications cosmiques, 1931).
21. Thémanlys, *Un séjour chez les grands initiés*, evokes Zarif as an "oriental dream" and an "Arab song" (p. 5) and depicts Théon's mansion in Zarif as a "Moorish Manor" (p. 8), adorned with amphora reminiscent of "Scherazade's tales" (p. 9).
22. Thémanlys, *Un séjour chez les grands initiés*, 11.

23. Théon's relations with his Arab workers were not always irenic. *La Tafna*, 15 April 1891, relates the arrest of Djilali ben Dali Yahya, probably a former worker at Zarif, indicted for theft from Max Théon.
24. Thémanlys, *Un séjour chez les grands initiés*, 54.
25. La Mère, *Entretiens. 1957–1958* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1994), 68.
26. Pascal Thémanlys, *Max Théon et la philosophie cosmique* (Jerusalem: Bibliothèque cosmique, 1955), 5.
27. Emile Dermenghem, *Le culte des saints dans l'Islam maghrébin* (Paris: NRF, Gallimard, 1954), 145–148.
28. Chanel, Deveney and Godwin, *La Fraternité Hermétique de Louxor*, 1113, point Théon's "absence of division between animal and man."
29. See the entry "Probst-Biraben" in Alain Messaoudi, *Les arabisants et la France coloniale. Annexes* (Paris: ENS éditions, 2015), 295–297; and Irène Mainguy, "Probst-Biraben (1875–1957), Franc-maçon haut en couleur, martiniste, théosophe et soufi," *Renaissance Traditionnelle* 15, no. 151 (2007): 260–285.
30. Xavier Yacono, *Un siècle de Franc-Maçonnerie algérienne* (*1785–1884*) (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1987), 104.
31. Edouard de Neveu, *Les Khouan. Ordres religieux chez les musulmans d'Algérie* (1845, Paris: Imprimerie de Guyot, 1846), 20. Cited in Thierry Zarcone, *Le croissant et le compas. Islam et Franc-maçonnerie, de la fascination à la détestation* (Paris: Dervy, 2015), 135.
32. Charles Brosselard, *Les khouan. De la constitution des ordres religieux musulmans en Algérie* (Algiers: Imp. A. Bourget, 1859), 10.
33. Brosselard, *Les khouan*, 17–18.
34. Yacono, *Un siècle de Franc-Maçonnerie algérienne*, 107.
35. Both local periodicals, *La Tafna* and *Le Courrier de Tlemcen*, refer to the "Société de Secours Mutuel Union de Tlemcen".
36. There is nothing regarding Tlemcen at the Archives Nationales d'Outre Mer (ANOM). Contrariwise, in its Department of Manuscripts, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF) hosts a *Fonds Maçonnique* (FM) with archives from the "Union de Tlemcen": the references of the three files I consulted are: FM 143, FM 83, and FM 842. Thanks to Salma Warscheid-Hargal for her great help in locating and finding these files. I went through another file, le Fichier Bossu, which contains hundreds of short biographies of French Masonic figures.
37. Among the founders of the Lodge, one finds three officers: Lieutenant-colonel Henri Bernard, commandant of the local garrison, Lieutenants Majory and Diaz who belong to the Military Music Band (see "Bernard," "Diaz," and "Majory" entries in the Fichier Bossu). Bernard is the first venerable master of the Lodge in 1860. He is an experienced Mason who

came from a Lodge in Oran, *L'Union Africaine*. Jules Le Proust Des Ageux, owner of a printing house and of the bookshop, another venerable of the first decades went first through two other Algerian lodges, in Philippeville and Sidi Bel Abbes. Victor Gérard, a former noncommissioned officer who settled in Tlemcen and became surveyor, is probably the first venerable who entered Masonry in Tlemcen. Among the founders, there is another surveyor named Laurens. The most striking political figure among the founders is undoubtedly the left-wing republican lawyer Eugène Aussenac (1809–1872). Suspected of being part of a political plot, he was arrested in 1850 in Oran where he was living and condemned for belonging to a "secret society." Jailed in the metropole for 18 months, he was tried again in February 1858 in the frame of Orsini's assassination attempt on Louis Napoleon. But the reason behind his trial was his support for the campaign of the republican general Cavaignac, elected MP in 1857 in Paris. Interned in Algeria, Aussenac benefited from an amnesty in August 1859 and settled in Tlemcen. A few months after his arrival in the town, he co-founded the Lodge. For Aussenac, see the entry in Jean Maitron's *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier français*. https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article25464.

38. It is printed by the Jules Le Proux des Ayeux, a French family settled in Tlemcen and Oran, and deeply involved in Freemasonry.
39. See among others, "Le Bal de la loge," *Le Courrier de Tlemcen*, 10 May 1895.
40. *Le Courrier de Tlemcen*, 8 May 1885. The article provides the names of the former Arab owners of the building, probably expropriated.
41. *Le Courrier de Tlemcen*, 29 October 1915.
42. *Le Courrier de Tlemcen*, 5 June 1891. More respectful toward magnetism, *La Tafna* leaves room for advertisement for Hector Durville's *Journal du Magnétisme*, pointing that Durville could provide some curative advices based on magnetism and sleepwalking for hopeless cases. See *La Tafna*, 7 July 1886.
43. See *La Tafna*, 26 January 1887 (Spiritism as science), 8 June 1892 (the pantomime "Pierrot le Spirite"), 6 May 1896 (the magician Cazeneuve presented as an "enemy of Spiritism"), though as "doctor in abstract and psychic sciences" [*sic*].
44. *Le Courrier de Tlemcen*, 4 July 1902.
45. Graham M. Jones, "Modern Magic and the War on Miracles in French Colonial Culture," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52, no 1 (2010): 66–99.
46. *Le Courrier de Tlemcen*, 24 July 1891.
47. André Combes, "Les loges de France et d'Algérie. L'antisémitisme et l'affaire Dreyfus," *Archives Juives* 43, no 2 (2010): 86.

48. Véga, "Redidja. IV," *Le Courrier de Tlemcen* 4 July 1902.
49. Léon Marx, "Le tombeau du Rab," *Le Courrier de Tlemcen* 30 December 1892.
50. Edouard Drumont, *La France juive*, vol. 2. (Paris: Marpon et Flammarion, 1886), 48.
51. *Le Courrier de Tlemcen* 25 May 1883.
52. *Le Courrier de Tlemcen* 3 December 1886.
53. *Le Courrier de Tlemcen* 15 and 28 July 1893.
54. For a reassessment of the Masonic aversion to intolerance (as well as to fanatism) see *Le Courrier de Tlemcen* 9 July 1875.
55. George Cazal, "Six semaines à Fez," *Le Courrier de Tlemcen* 13 February 1903. The article is taken from the *Lyon républicain*. For Mouliéras' biography, see Claude Lefébure and Alain Messaoudi, "Mouliéras Auguste," in François Pouillon (ed.), *Dictionnaire des orientalistes de langue française* (Paris: IISM-Karthala, 2008), 712–713.
56. Known also as Joseph al-Ashkar.
57. In 1851, the Jewish population of the town was 2688.
58. Moise Weil, *Le cimetière israélite de Tlemcen* (Avignon: Seguin Frères, 1881), 9.
59. It was one of the eight synagogues of Tlemcen. Alfred Parienti, "Tlemcen ville sainte," *Le petit Tlemcenien* May 15, 1930.
60. There is no evidence of the presence of Kabbalists in Tlemcen before the arrival of exiled Jews from Spain. Kabbalah developed in Morocco before these exiles. For the Drâa Valley, in the south, see Haim Zafrani, "Les kabbalistes du Drâa," *Horizons maghrébins – droit à la mémoire* 27 (1994), 26–28.
61. See "Khalaz, Judah ben Abraham," *in* https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/khala-x1e93-judah-ben-abraham. *Sefer ha-Musar* was published in 1537 in Constantinople.
62. This is the case in Morocco. For the inner struggles in Spain, *cf.* Boaz Huss, "Les étapes majeures dans la réception du Zohar," in Pierre Gisel et al. (ed.), *Réceptions de la cabale* (Paris: Editions de l'Eclat, 2007), 61.
63. For Berab, see "Berab, Jacob b. Moses," in http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/3023-berab-jacob-b-moses. For Saba: Abraham Gross, *Iberian Jewry from twilight to dawn: the world of Rabbi Abraham Saba* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 10–14.
64. Some of them were passing through other routes via Ottoman cities of Salonica and Adrianople in the Balkans.
65. Adolf Neubauer, "Literary gleanings. X. Joseph Al-Ashkar," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 6, no. 2 (January 1894): 401.
66. Moshe Idel, "Jewish Mysticism in Spain: Some cultural observations," *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma, Serie III, Historia Medieval* 7 (1994): 289–314.

67. For Sasportas, see Yaacob Dweck, *Dissident Rabbi: The Life of Jacob Sasportas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 34, 36–37, 43, 59, 71 and 73–74.
68. For a detailed study on Abraham Ankawa (al-Naqwa) though omitting the Kabbalist dimension, see Jessica J. Marglin, "Modernity through Jewish Eyes: The Transimperial Life of Abraham Ankawa," *Jewish Social Studies* 20, no. 2 (Winter 2014): 34–68.
69. Lawrence Fine, "Dimensions of Kabbalah from the Spanish expulsion to the dawn of Hasidism," *in* Jonathan Karp and Adam Sutcliffe (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism: Volume 7, The Early Modern World, 1500–1815* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 439–447.
70. Thanks to Boaz Huss for the mention of European developments.
71. Abbé Jean Joseph Léandre Bargès, *Tlemcen, ancienne capitale du royaume de ce nom* (Paris: Benjamin Duprat—Challamel, 1859), 92.
72. Boas Huss has pointed that *Gemilut Hassadim* is a term for any act of charity and that there is not (such) a name for the burial of books, although, possibly this is related to the acts of the Hevra Kadisha, responsible for the burial of both human beings and books, whose acts are considered to be charity.
73. According to Boaz Huss, this is probably the name of the Hevra Kadisha.
74. Chanel, Deveney and Godwin, *La Fraternité Hermétique de Louxor*, 23. Boaz Huss, in an article to be published on "Cosmic Philosophy and the Kabbalah," points out that there is no evidence for this, and does not think that Théon knew much about Kabbalah or Hassidism.
75. According to Boaz Huss, some contacts are listed in the unpublished diary of Théon's secretary, Teresa (whose birth name was Augusta Rolfe).
76. *Le Petit Tlemcenien* 10 March 1927.
77. See Susan Slyomovics, "Geographies of Jewish Tlemcen," *The Journal of North African Studies* 5 no. 4 (2000): 83.
78. Marc Semenoff, *Pour connaître la pensée du Bouddha* (Paris: Bordas, 1959), 127.
79. For the legend of the rabbi, see Slyomovics, *Geographies of Jewish Tlemcen*, and Parienti, *Tlemcen ville sainte*.
80. See Joshua Schreiber, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith. The Civilizing Mission in Colonial Algeria* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010). The book focuses on Oran as a case study.
81. Valérie Assan, *Les Consistoires Israélites d'Algérie au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2012), 239.
82. Paul Vuillaud "Notes critiques sur la cabale," *Les entretiens idéalistes*, 1, no. 25 (October 1906): 113. Vuillaud's article comments on the issue of Jean de Pauly's translation to French of the *Zohar* that started to be issued in 1906. He probably refers to Abraham Meyer, *Étude des moeurs actu-*

elles des Israélites de Tlemcen: précédée d'une notice complète sur Rabenou Ephraim Aln'Caoua (Meyer: Algiers 1902). The attribution of the Zohar to Abulafia, suggested by Rabbi Meyer, is an idea that has been first floated by Meyer Henrich Hirsch Landauer in a posthumous work (1845) but quickly given up. See Boaz Huss, "The Formation of "Jewish Mysticism" and its impact on the reception pf Rabbi Abraham Abulafia in Contemporary Kabbalah," in Heike de Bock, Jorg Feuchter and Michi Knechts (ed.), *Religion and Its Other: Secular and Sacral Concepts and Practices in Interaction* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2008), 149 and note 20.

83. For Bliah, see Jean Laloum and Monique Lévy, "Haim Bliah, dayan à Tlemcen" *Archives Juives* 37, no. 1 (2004): 121–122.
84. Simon Scharzfuchs, "Le judaïsme algérien devant le choix. La crise de 1905," in *Les relations intercommunautaires juives en Méditerranée occidentale, 13e–20e siècles* (Paris: CNRS, 1984), 205.
85. Eventually the manuscript was not published by Weill, who donated it to the "Bibliothèque nationale de Paris." As there is nothing like the Bibliothèque nationale de Paris, Fenton means probably here with the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), based in Paris.
86. Weil, *Le cimetière israélite de Tlemcen* (Avignon: Seguin Frères, 1881), 12.
87. The inscription on the new 1849 tombstone used these words to express the feelings of local Jews toward Ephraim al-Naqwa.
88. See Paul B. Fenton, "Moïse Weil, Grand Rabbin d'Alger (1852–1914)" *Histoire des Juifs d'Alsace et de Lorraine*, http://judaisme.sdv.fr/histoire/rabbins/mweil/mweil.htm, accessed May 19, 2020.
89. Fenton, "Moïse Weil," 7.
90. Fenton, "Moïse Weil," 6.
91. Colette Sirat, "La pensée philosophique d'Ephraim Al-Naqawa," *Daat: A Journal of Jewish Philosophy & Kabbalah* 5 (1980): 5–21.
92. Guillaume Cuchet, *Les voix d'Outre-tombe. Tables tournantes, spiritisme et société au XIXème siècle* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2012), 244.
93. Edmond Doutté, *Note sur l'Islam magribin. Les marabouts* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1900), 69.
94. Allan Kardec, "Les Aïssaoua ou les convulsionnaires de la rue Peletier," *La Revue spirite* 11, no. 1 (January 1868). Kardec quotes *Le Monde illustré* (October 19, 1867), *Le Petit Journal* (September 30, 1867) and an article by the Orientalist novelist Théophile Gautier in *Le Moniteur* (July 29, 1867).
95. Jules du Potet, "Danse des Aïssoua," *Journal du Magnétisme* 13 (1854): 352–355; and André Saturnin, "Les Aïssaouas," *Journal du Magnétisme* 16 (1857): 253–262.
96. Jones, "Modern Magic," 89.

97. For a further mention of Spiritist societies in Tlemcen, see J. M., "Conférences en Algérie," *La Revue spirite* 63 (July 1920): 215.
98. Even though the balls organized by the Lodge were open to women.
99. Nicole Edelman, "Spiritisme et politique," *Revue d'histoire du XIXème siècle* 28 (2004): 149–161. Edelman cites H. V., *La femme et la philosophie spirite, influence des croyances philosophiques sur la situation de la femme dans l'antiquité, le Moyen Âge et de nos jours* (Paris: Librairie spirite, 1870).
100. H. V., *La femme et la philosophie spirie*, 207–239. The female saint patron of Tlemcen was Lalla Setti.
101. H. V., *La femme et la philosophie spirie*, 162–164.
102. *La Revue Spirite* 1870, 166.
103. Julia A. Clancy Smith, "Le regard colonial: Islam, genre et identités dans la fabrication de l'Algérie française. 1830–1962," *Nouvelles questions féminines* 25, no. 1 (2006): 25–40.
104. Max Théon, *La doctrine spirite et l'œuvre d'Allan Kardec. Etude critique du spiritisme* (Paris, Librairie du magnétisme, 1900); Max Théon, *Spiritisme expérimental. Médiums—Obsession—Identité des Esprits—Evocation* (Paris: Librairie Spiritualiste Lucien Chamuel, 1900).
105. Thanks to Boaz Huss for the reference to Teresa's unpublished diary.
106. *Le Courrier de Tlemcen*, 11 September 1891.
107. *Le Courrier de Tlemcen*, 11 September 1891.

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CHAPTER 7

Alfarabi as Leo Strauss's Teacher of Platonic Esoteric Writing: Leo Strauss's Rediscovery of Esotericism and its Islamic Origin

Rasoul Namazi

Leo Strauss (1899–1973), a German–American political philosopher and historian of philosophy of Jewish decent, dedicated his whole career to the study of classical texts of political thought. He rehabilitated political philosophy as a prominent discipline and field of research after its decline under the attacks of twentieth-century positivism and behavioralism. No dimension of Strauss's thought has attracted more controversy than his claims about the "art of writing," or esotericism. It is not, however, surprising to find Strauss's discussion of esotericism particularly problematic: esotericism was at the center of Strauss's thought. A defender of philosophy understood as a way of life dedicated to the study of permanent questions, Strauss concentrated his efforts on reading what he called "Great Books," the classic writings of major philosophers from Xenophon, Plato, and Aristotle, to Spinoza, Hobbes, and Rousseau. As he did not believe that eternal questions are susceptible to receive final answers, he thought that no thinker can claim he or she has definitely refuted the doctrines of

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past thinkers. The study of old books was not therefore for Strauss an antiquarian enterprise but a genuine philosophical activity. He invited his readers to reconsider the conflict of reason and revelation, the quarrel of ancients and moderns, the question of historicism, the distinction of facts and values, and similar questions which modern philosophy and its representatives considered resolved and decided definitively.[1] He dedicated his writings and teaching to the meticulous study of classic texts and applied his "esoteric reading" to those writings in a way which radically distinguishes him from other commentators and historians of political philosophy. Esotericism is therefore constantly present in Strauss's writings and occupies a unique position in his thought.

What is particularly distinctive and relevant to the study of esotericism is that Strauss's idea of esotericism—the idea which plays a central role in his thought—is heavily influenced by Strauss's preoccupation with medieval Islamic philosophy. In other words, we are here dealing with a remarkable case of transmission of key ideas from Islamic sources to a modern thinker who in turn applied these same ideas to the study of classical Greek, Jewish, Christian, and modern writings. In what follows, it will be shown that Strauss's understanding of esotericism has, at least partly, Islamic origins, or more precisely a Farabian origin. This will be shown first by tracing Strauss's discovery of esotericism in his early writings; it will be argued that Alfarabi (Abu Nasr Muhammad al-Farabi, 872–950) is the key thinker who influenced Strauss's intellectual development and guided him to the discovery of esotericism. Next, we will discuss a remarkable but often underappreciated essay of Strauss, "Farabi's Plato," which depicts Strauss's remarkable reading of Alfarabi, the reading which decided the major principles of Strauss's historiography and philosophical reflections.

But before we turn to Strauss's discovery of esotericism, it is necessary to define what he means by esotericism. Strauss's understanding of esotericism should perhaps be called *philosophical esotericism*, to distinguish it from other kinds of esotericism, for example from religious esotericism. Strauss's understanding of esotericism is closely related to one of the most fundamental principles of modernity, namely freedom of speech, and one of the most important concerns of the founders of modern political philosophy, namely persecution of thought. Although freedom of speech is one of the most cherished freedoms of modern societies, Strauss reminds us of the exceptional character of our modern condition by recalling what the citizens of modern societies tend to forget: the persecution of thought for most of human history. And if the passage of a few centuries has made

us forget this basic historical fact, Strauss reminds us of the unique and short history of freedom of speech and persecution of freethinkers, philosophers, and scientists, by alluding to the existence of persecution in his own time, in the contemporary totalitarian regimes.[2] Although persecution has a long history, even the most radical forms of persecution in history have not succeeded in eliminating free thought and heterodoxy. In fact, Strauss claims, persecution cannot prevent expression of heterodox thought because in all centuries and under different forms of repression, writers have found ways to utter heterodox ideas in writing without incurring danger. They succeeded in doing this by "writing between the lines," by developing "a peculiar technique of writing," a "peculiar type of literature" in which the heterodox truth is presented exclusively between the lines.[3] These peculiar writings can be read by everyone but they are actually addressed to a particular group of readers who can read between the lines. This concealed knowledge is called *esoteric*, a knowledge accessible to a select group of people, mainly very high-ranking philosophers or thinkers. This knowledge is not supernatural, mystical, Gnostic, Kabbalistic, or Theosophical; it is accessible to unaided natural human reason without any help from supernatural sources. It is esoteric because it has been concealed from the many, from the vulgar, by those who are in possession of it. The philosophers who possess esoteric knowledge do not divulge this kind of knowledge to the many and share it, through esoteric methods of writing, only with a select few readers who know these methods. To the many, the possessors of the esoteric knowledge convey only ideas which are not strictly speaking true. These untrue ideas advertised by philosophers to the many are called *exoteric*.

For Strauss, esoteric writers conceal their views and practice esotericism for different reasons. Many of them conceal their views to protect themselves from persecution.[4] However, another "earlier type of writers" believed that there are truths which should not be communicated to the many simply because they would do harm to the established social order.[5] In other words, they believed that there are *dangerous truths* from which the society must be protected. This second kind of esotericism, Strauss claims, is found among those philosophers who belonged to a tradition of premodern Enlightenment. Modern and premodern Enlightenments share a common goal: they seek after knowledge and claim the freedom to philosophize. However, the premodern and modern Enlightenments diverge in their projects which are meant to realize the freedom of philosophy: the modern Enlightenment intends to realize freedom of thought

and philosophy through the education of the many; modern philosophers think this education will lead to the foundation of a free liberal society which guarantees the right to philosophize and question everything. The premodern and medieval rationalism or Enlightenment, on the contrary, was founded on the idea that a society in which a complete freedom to criticize the authoritative beliefs is recognized is impossible and even undesirable. Strauss argued that for premodern philosophers there is a necessary conflict between philosophy and politics because opinion is the element and principle of society and attempts to replace opinion by knowledge through radical questioning and doubt, which are essential to philosophy, are harmful to political health of society.[6] It is therefore necessary to avoid propagating philosophical and politically subversive knowledge; one must keep the truths secret and avoid transmitting them to the masses.[7] While in the first type of esotericism the philosopher practices esotericism to avoid persecution, in this second case he practices esotericism to protect society from doubts and radical questionings which are dangerous for the stability of a well-ordered society. According to Strauss, modern rationalism completely disregards this form of esotericism. It is for this reason that one might describe premodern rationalism as essentially esoteric while modern rationalism is essentially exoteric. One tries to hide its most important discoveries from the many while the other strives to propagate them. The premodern rationalism of thinkers like Plato or Alfarabi reserves philosophic knowledge to the few who possess suitable natures for understanding it while modern thinkers like Spinoza (1632–1677) or Hobbes (1588–1679) propagate that knowledge with the belief that the many can be enlightened and freed from dogmas and superstitions.

There are other kinds of esotericism that Strauss mentions: for instance, the kind of esotericism that is practiced for pedagogical reasons. In this type of esotericism, philosophers embrace obscurity and refrain from conveying their true teachings directly, not because of fear of persecution or to protect society from dangerous and unsettling ideas, but to educate their young students and future philosophers. This type of esoteric writing demands the active participation of the reader: the reader cannot remain the passive audience of the written text but must work his way through the arguments on his own, face the contradictions in the text, and discover the unwritten statements of the writer.[8] Regardless of the different motives of esoteric writers, Strauss is clearly only interested in what I have called

philosophical esotericism.[9] One must therefore have this understanding of esotericism in view while dealing with Strauss's writings on esotericism.

The Discovery of Philosophical Esotericism

Dating Strauss's discovery of esotericism is not as simple as it might seem and there has been a debate about the origins or the dating of Strauss's discovery of esotericism. Now one should first bear in mind that this is not a simple biographical debate about dating Strauss's discovery but rather, as we shall see, a debate about the place of Islamic Philosophy in Strauss's thought in general and the unique importance of Alfarabi in his intellectual odyssey.

There are two early unpublished writings on esotericism found among Strauss's papers: "Exoteric Teaching" was written sometime in December 1939; the second, which seems to be contemporaneous with the first, is a series of notes for a lecture entitled "Persecution and the Art of Writing."[10] These two writings seem to be Strauss's first attempts to elucidate the concept of esotericism independently of any specific historical text and thus they can be distinguished from other early and published esoteric studies of Strauss. Those other writings, mainly written from the early 1940s, apply Strauss's esoteric hermeneutics to the writings of thinkers like Xenophon (431–354 B.C.), Maimonides (1138–1204), Judah Halevy (1075–1141), Greek political philosophers, and Alfarabi.[11] But who is discussed in these two early writings? In "Exoteric Teaching" Strauss avoids discussion or even naming any medieval Jewish or Islamic thinker and mainly discusses Lessing (1729–1781) and Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and refers to Aristotle, Leibniz (1646–1716), Zeller (1814–1918), Kant (1724–1804), Ferguson (1723–1816), Rousseau (1712–1778), and Jacobi (1743–1819).[12] Strauss's lecture notes also only mention Western thinkers including Cervantes (1547–1616), Lessing, Hobbes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Montesquieu (1689–1755), Descartes (1596–1650), Bacon (1561–1626), Aristotle, Plato, Cicero (106–43 B.C.), and Xenophon. Interestingly, Strauss claims that in his lecture he wishes to speak mainly of ancient and medieval esotericism, but no medieval writer is named.[13]

If we had access only to these early writings, we would have to conclude that Strauss discovered esotericism through the study of a few classical Greek and European writers. However, there exists another earlier source of information about the discovery of esotericism by Strauss, namely his private correspondence. As can be deduced from his letters to Jacob Klein

(1899–1978),[14] Strauss's discovery of esotericism happens around January 1938, that is, nearly two years before the two above-mentioned texts. Between January 1938 and November 1939, Strauss sends 42 letters to Klein, among them 16 letters discuss esotericism in some length.[15] From the letters we can deduce that Maimonides is the key writer who guides Strauss to his discovery esotericism and the application of esoteric reading to other writers happen *after* the discovery of the esoteric Maimonides.[16] However, this is not the end or rather the beginning of the story: the discovery of the esoteric Maimonides has a prehistory which must be taken into account, an episode which is prior to the 1938 correspondence with Klein. But before going further back I should mention an important point: in his letters of January 20 and February 16, 1938, that is, the first two of Strauss's esoteric letters, Alfarabi is mentioned alongside Maimonides and their connection is emphasized. In the first letter Strauss writes that, for Maimonides, the crucial question was not the createdness or eternity of the world—according to Strauss, Maimonides, contrary to his explicit claims, believed in the eternity of the world. Strauss claims that for Maimonides the crucial question was whether the ideal legislator must be a prophet. Strauss writes that Maimonides, again in an esoteric way, denied this necessity, "as Farabi had before him and Averroes did in his own time."[17] As we shall see, one cannot disregard this connection between Maimonides and Alfarabi. It is true that in the subsequent letters Alfarabi and Averroes (1126–1198) disappear, but so does Maimonides. In other words, even in Strauss's private correspondence, Alfarabi remains crucial for the study of Strauss's discovery of esotericism and is somehow connected with Maimonides.

Considering the importance of Maimonides for Strauss's discovery of esotericism, to trace his discovery of esotericism one must follow his writings on Maimonides, which predate his correspondence with Klein. Strauss discusses Maimonides in his 1930 *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, but that study does not show any awareness of or even interest in the question of esotericism in Maimonides's works: in that book, words like *esoteric*, *esotericism*, *exoteric*, and *exotericism* are absent and Strauss calls Maimonides "a believing Jew," while after his discovery of esotericism he writes that "Maimonides in his beliefs was *absolutely* no Jew."[18] It is therefore after that book and in Strauss's subsequent writings on Maimonides that one must look for the discovery of esotericism. "Maimonides' Doctrine of Prophecy and Its Sources" (1934–35), which was reprinted as the third chapter of *Philosophy and Law* (1935) in a revised and abbreviated form, is

properly speaking Strauss's first independent study of Maimonides's writings: in his previous studies, Strauss mainly concentrated on the points of contrast between Spinoza and Maimonides but in this study he provides a discussion of Maimonides's understanding of prophecy by tracing it to the writings of his *Muslim predecessors*, mainly Alfarabi and Avicenna (980–1037).[19] Strauss argues that Maimonides followed his Muslim teachers and they provided him with fundamental principles of his thought. Apart from his reference to Maimonides's Muslim predecessors, another significant aspect of this essay for Strauss's intellectual biography is that in this text he shows the first signs of realization of the importance of esotericism. Strauss here claims that the medieval Enlightenment of Maimonides and his predecessors was essentially esoteric, while the Enlightenment of the modern philosophers was essentially exoteric. Now, in Strauss's essay it is not entirely clear what Maimonides's esoteric teaching is. However, one has a feeling that Maimonides's view is not entirely orthodox: for instance, Maimonides argues for the superiority of the prophet to the philosopher because the prophet has access to the supernatural knowledge which is inaccessible to the philosopher. However, this claim is followed by an important qualification: the prophet's superiority is founded on the contribution of the faculty of imagination. But as Strauss mentions, the critique of imagination is one of the major themes of Maimonides's *Guide for the Perplexed*.[20]

Strauss's next study on Maimonides, "Some Remarks on the Political Science of Maimonides and Farabi" (1936), highlights more forcefully than before the importance of Alfarabi for understanding Maimonides's thought: here Strauss begins by speaking of Maimonides's *maîtres musulmans* and of the profound agreement between Jewish and Muslim thought. He believes that adequate understanding of medieval Jewish philosophy is only possible by beginning from Alfarabi's Platonism and he therefore declares his intention to show the influence of Alfarabi's philosophy on Maimonides.[21] This growing importance of Alfarabi is concomitant with the awareness of the existence of esotericism in Maimonides's writings: Strauss reminds us that Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed* is an "esoteric book" in which Maimonides has "concealed his thought." Maimonides, Strauss claims, expresses his thought only by "allusions;" one must therefore read his book with "particular attention" to discover his esoteric teaching.[22] Maimonides does not convey his thoughts explicitly but through signs which suffice for one "'who will understand,'" for an attentive and duly instructed reader." One of the main qualifications of

the knowledgeable reader is that he knows Alfarabi's writings.[23] It is not therefore surprising that Strauss's "Some Remarks" is contemporary with one of his few writings dedicated specifically to Alfarabi, that is, "A Lost Writing of Farabi's" written sometime in 1935 and published in 1936. This scholarly and conventional essay claims that some passages commonly thought to be from Alfarabi's *Enumeration of the Sciences* actually belong to the first part of a trilogy of Alfarabi which includes *Attainment of Happiness*, *Philosophy of Plato*, and *Philosophy of Aristotle*. This essay is perhaps Strauss's strongest statement about the essential importance of Alfarabi for understanding Maimonides's writings. To make his claim more powerful, Strauss cites a letter from Maimonides in which he recommends Alfarabi's writings exclusively and calls Alfarabi's works "pure flour."[24] For Maimonides, the works of Alfarabi surpass any other, even those of Avicenna, who was put side by side Alfarabi in Strauss's previous writings on Maimonides. Strauss concludes his essay by a remarkable statement about the importance of Alfarabi: "At the beginning of this epoch of the history of philosophy there stands not just any 'predecessor,' but the towering spirit who laid the ground for the later development and set down its limits by making his task the revival of Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy as philosophy proper."[25]

Strauss's subsequent writings on Maimonides go in the same direction and join Alfarabi and esotericism: "The Place of the Doctrine of Providence According to Maimonides" (1937) proclaims the existence of "the secret teaching of the *Guide*" and indicates the Maimonides's agreement with Alfarabi regarding the exoteric character of the doctrine of divine rewards and punishment. These exoteric doctrines are not true but necessary for the welfare of the political order.[26] In the same vein, "On Abravanel's Philosophical Tendency and Political Teaching" (1937) speaks of "Maimonides and his teachers" who borrowed the idea from Plato's *Laws* that law contains beliefs addressed to the vulgar which are not true but useful and necessary for the wellbeing of the political community. Maimonides has made, Strauss claims, this distinction known in a "disguised way, partly by allusions, partly by the composition of his whole work," methods which are recognizable only to readers of his writings who are philosophers and inaccessible to non-philosophers. For instance, Strauss argues that Maimonides, contrary to his exoteric statements, actually did not believe in *creatio ex nihilo*.[27]

A Forgotten Writing of Strauss: "Farabi's Plato"

From the previous observations we can conclude that Strauss's discovery of esotericism is powerfully linked with his change of perspective on Maimonides, which in turn is due to the growing importance of Alfarabi in his writings. While his most revealing writing on Maimonides in this period, namely "The Secret Teaching of Maimonides" written sometime between 1937 and 1940, announces Strauss's philosophic breakthrough to Maimonidean esoteric style of writing,[28] as it was shown it is only through attention to his dispersed remarks in this period that one can observe his growing interest in Alfarabi, what some call "the Farabian turn" in his thought.[29] But why, in the first place, does Strauss turn toward Maimonides and Alfarabi? In order to fully grasp the nature of Strauss's Farabian turn one must understand Strauss's interest in what he calls medieval Enlightenment.

In the 1964 preface of his *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and its Genesis* Strauss writes that "The theologico-political problem has remained … *the* theme of my inquiries."[30] This claim perfectly represents the theme of Strauss's early intellectual career. The theologico-political problem, at its most basic level, is the tension between philosophy or reason on the one hand and religion or revelation on the other. This is the major concern of Strauss during his whole life: what to do with the conflict of religion and philosophy? In his first book on Spinoza, Strauss studies this question, the conflict of religion and philosophy, and arrives at the conclusion that the modern argument against biblical revelation, represented above all by Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*, has not succeeded in refuting religion and the claims of biblical revealed religion.[31] In other words, the modern critique of religion has not succeeded in resolving the conflict of philosophy and religion in favor of philosophy and the claims of revelation stand unrefuted. Facing this situation, unable to accept the position of the modern Enlightenment, Strauss had one option: return to orthodoxy and revelation. Strauss rejects a return to orthodoxy[32] and, finding himself in a difficult position, unable to embrace the modern critique of religion or a form of religious orthodoxy, he was forced to find the solution of the theologico-political problem elsewhere. This *elsewhere* proved to be premodern rationalism. As the conflict of religion and philosophy or reason and revelation is primarily a question in the context of the so-called Abrahamic religions, Strauss looked for this form of premodern rationalism mainly in the writings of medieval thinkers, not

surprisingly above all in the writings of Jewish thinkers like Maimonides.[33] The road taken by Strauss led from Maimonides to Plato but before that, Strauss had to rediscover Plato by way of Alfarabi. In other words, Strauss's reflection on the theologico-political problem led him to Spinoza and Hobbes, then to Maimonides, and his studies on Maimonides pointed him back toward Alfarabi, and through Alfarabi Strauss was guided back toward Maimonides and subsequently to Plato. It is therefore not surprising that Strauss once called "Arabic political philosophy" his "specialty" because he found his major ideas in the writings of Alfarabi and his disciples.[34] This road from Maimonides to Alfarabi and then to Plato is perfectly illustrated at the beginning of "Farabi's Plato," to which we will now turn.

"Farabi's Plato," published in an obscure Festschrift dedicated to Louis Ginzberg in 1945, is a peculiar kind of writing. It is the first Straussian writing entirely dedicated to an Islamic subject or rather an Islamic philosopher.[35] But contrary to many other writings of Strauss, "Farabi's Plato" was never republished in Strauss's later books. More interestingly, in the preface of his 1952 *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Strauss claims that for "the Introduction I have made free use of my article 'Farabi's Plato.'" Considering the relevance of this essay to the question of esotericism, it is surprising that Strauss did not include the whole essay in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, the collections of essays which include writings published from 1941 to 1948.[36] We might find an answer to this question by understanding the content of "Farabi's Plato."

Strauss opens his text by reminding us of a well-known issue: that to understand Maimonides one must understand his Islamic Aristotelian predecessors. Among these Islamic predecessors Alfarabi occupies a privileged place because Maimonides himself presents Alfarabi as the most important authority in philosophy and recommends his so-called *Political Regime* (*al-siyāsa al-madaniyya*) to others as an exceptional book. Strauss mentions in passing that this book contains "the silent rejection of certain tenets" of Alfarabi's other writings,[37] but he refrains from enumerating the rejected tenets and we have to wait to see what "silent" means. Be that as it may, what Strauss finds particularly striking in this book is its Platonic character: in this book, Alfarabi like Plato in the *Republic* and the *Laws* treats the whole of philosophy in a political framework. However, whatever the merits and importance of Alfarabi's *Political Regime*, Strauss does not dedicate his essay to a discussion of this book but rather delves into another writing of Alfarabi entitled "The philosophy of Plato, its parts,

and the grades of dignity of its parts, from its beginning to its end." This writing of Alfarabi is part of a larger work consisting of three parts: *Attainment of Happiness*, *Philosophy of Plato*, *Philosophy of Aristotle*.[38] Strauss announces that a study of *Philosophy of Plato* helps us "grasp fully the character of Farabi's Platonism and therewith of Farabi's own philosophy, and thus to take the first step toward the understanding of the philosophic background of Maimonides."[39] The scene is therefore set for a discussion of this minor work of Alfarabi which will somehow help us understand Alfarabi, Maimonides, and Plato. But one should not ignore Strauss's passing remark that *Philosophy of Plato* is the "central part" of that tripartite book.[40]

In *Philosophy of Plato* Alfarabi intends to provide an exhaustive presentation of Platonic philosophy. In view of the fact that many Platonic themes are absent in Alfarabi's presentation, Strauss suggests that such missing topics "are considered by [Alfarabi] either as unimportant or merely exoteric."[41] Now Alfarabi discusses the Platonic philosophy by following what he considers to be the inner and necessary sequence of Plato's investigations. He does this by assigning to each step of Plato's investigation one dialog. However, Strauss confesses that this procedure is not free of difficulties as what Alfarabi says about some of the dialogs "sounds in some cases fairly fanciful." Surprisingly, Strauss disregards this aspect of Alfarabi's presentation by claiming that this is an unimportant issue. What is more important, according to Strauss, is how Alfarabi interprets the whole of Plato's philosophy. We shall see later on, that this is not actually a minor issue.

Strauss draws our attention to the fact that for Alfarabi, Plato's investigation is guided by the issue of the perfection of man, by his happiness. Man's happiness is inseparable from "a certain science and a certain way of life."[42] Plato's investigation leads him to conclude that the science is supplied by philosophy and the way of life is supplied by the royal or political art. In other words, man in order to reach perfection needs both philosophy and the royal art. Furthermore, Plato has concluded that philosopher and king are identical. This conclusion (which Strauss reminds us is far from any kind of Neoplatonism) leads to a further question: what is the proper relationship of philosophy and politics in Plato's thought? In order to clarify this issue, one must first explain what the meaning of philosophy is. Strauss reminds us of the ambiguous meaning of philosophy in Alfarabi's treatise: on the one hand, philosophy seems to be concerned with happiness and as happiness is the subject of political science, philosophy seems

to be essentially political. But philosophy would be essentially political if the only subject of philosophy were the political things, "the noble and the just things."[43] However, it seems that for Alfarabi's Plato, philosophy is essentially theoretical and is therefore concerned with "the science of the essence of each of all beings." In other words, philosophy is that theoretical science which supplies knowledge of the essence of beings and is therefore distinguished from the practical art of the king or the royal art which supplies the desired way of life.

This precise meaning of philosophy, Strauss claims, can be reconciled with another view according to which philosophy also includes political philosophy: a philosopher who investigates the essence of all beings has to justify his investigation or his way of life; he must answer the question "why philosophy?" which amounts to asking "what is the best way of life?" As man is a political being and as the right way of life is at the center of all moral and political investigations, this question is essentially a political question. In other words, the philosopher in addition to his investigation of the essence of all beings must necessarily engage in an investigation of political virtues. Strauss remarks in passing that the philosopher giving an account of his doings and discovery of the truth is somehow also connected with the difficulties obstructing "its communication." However, Strauss clarifies that regardless of the close relationship of philosophy and political philosophy, one must admit that for Alfarabi, these two are not precisely the same and belong to two different planes. Strauss here dedicates a dense paragraph to the study of the question of the relationship between philosophy and royal art.[44] He distinguishes three different statements of Alfarabi on this issue: first, Alfarabi claims that philosopher and king in possession of the royal art are the same. Second, he claims that philosopher has one function through which he reaches his perfection and the king has another function through which he reaches his perfection. Third, philosopher and king have each one function which supplies the science and the way of life and thus produces happiness. Strauss seems to believe that the second or central statement is Alfarabi's true teaching, but he also claims that one cannot assume that "the average reader" will consider "Farabi's second or central statement" his last word on the subject. But why does Alfarabi hesitate to communicate his true teaching openly and why does he write in a way that is inaccessible to the average reader? In other words, why does Alfarabi make several contradictory statements about the relationship between philosophy and the royal art and blur the distinction between them? Strauss claims on the authority of Maimonides

that contradictions are a common device used by esoteric writers; it therefore seems that Alfarabi has an esoteric teaching which he tries to conceal from the average reader and to which he guides the select few. This teaching is that theoretical philosophy by itself produces happiness "in this life, i.e. the only happiness which is possible."[45] In other words, the contradictions in Alfarabi's statement on the relationship between philosophy and royal art point toward the issue of the immortality of the soul.

It becomes therefore necessary to discuss the question of the immortality of the soul in Alfarabi's writings. Strauss surprisingly claims that Alfarabi does not believe in the immortality of the soul. To prove this, he draws our attention to the fact that in the tripartite work, Alfarabi mentions the distinction between this world and the next in the first part, while in the second and therefore "the least exposed part" of the work, which is dedicated to Plato's philosophy, there is no mention of the immortality of the soul nor of any distinction between this world and the next. According to Strauss, the silence of Alfarabi means that he either rejects Plato's doctrine of immortality or he considers it an exoteric doctrine. Strauss also mentions another reason why Alfarabi thought it prudent to reveal his attitude toward immortality in the second part of the work: contrary to the first part in which Alfarabi speaks in his own name, the second part "sets forth explicitly not so much his own view, as the views of someone else." The same method is also used in other writings of Alfarabi: in *The Political Regime* and *The Book of Religion*, the works in which Alfarabi expounds his own views, he pronounces more or less orthodox views concerning life after death. However, in his lost commentary on *Nicomachean Ethics* he flatly denies the possibility of life after death. In fact, Strauss points to the fact that while commenting on Plato's philosophy, Alfarabi goes out of his way to avoid attributing orthodox doctrines like belief in immortality of the soul to Plato and instead deviates from the letter of Plato's works, for example from *Phaedo*, and attributes unorthodox views to him.[46] From this observation Strauss concludes a general rule: in order to discover Alfarabi's views, one must avoid the works in which he expounds his own views explicitly, but rather consult those "historical" works in which he "avails himself of the specific immunity of the commentator" and expounds his own views in guise of commenting on some other philosopher's writings. Other writings of Alfarabi in which he defends orthodox positions different from his commentaries, according to Strauss, "have to be dismissed as prudential accommodations to the accepted dogma."[47] Alfarabi hesitates about stating his esoteric doctrine because he believes that

philosopher does not need anything apart from philosophy to attain happiness and in fact only philosophy can supply true happiness. This teaching would not only contradict the Islamic belief in the necessity of religion for man's happiness and therefore expose Alfarabi to persecution, but would also mean that happiness is only within the reach of the philosophers alone and non-philosophers are eternally barred from happiness.[48] To avoid persecution in a religious society and also to avoid bringing despair to the non-philosophic majority, Alfarabi conceals his true esoteric teaching.

Strauss's thesis regarding the importance of Alfarabi's commentaries for understanding his own ideas has an important consequence: Alfarabi's deviation from the letter of Plato's teaching might be due to the fact that he believed that Plato himself considered those teachings merely exoteric. But Alfarabi might have simply expounded views which he himself was thinking are true. In other words, Strauss claims, Alfarabi's commentaries on Plato's works are not "historical" works and this is why the summaries which he provides of some of the Platonic dialogs seem rather fictitious; in these writings Alfarabi does not present "the historical Plato;" he uses commentary and summaries as a vehicle for transmitting what he considers to be the true teaching. Strauss, to show that this is not an un-Platonic idea, compares Alfarabi's way of presenting Plato with Plato's own way of presenting Socrates, and also Socrates way of presenting historical Egypt. According to Strauss, by "this very fact [Alfarabi] reveals himself as a true Platonist."

Conclusion

Strauss bases his thesis on esotericism on what he considered to be a well-known characteristic of many societies, namely: persecution of heterodox thought. He argues that closed societies do not recognize the right to evaluate and criticize the authoritative beliefs of those societies. In such societies, Strauss believes freethinkers are faced with grave dangers, and must protect themselves and their ideas through a certain writing technique designed to conceal as much as it reveals. If these thinkers decide to transmit their thoughts to other freethinkers or potential freethinkers, they must practice an art of *esoteric writing*, or, writing in a way that conceals one's heterodox ideas from all but those who are knowledgeable about the practice of reading "between the lines." Esotericism allows the majority of readers to receive a conventional message while allowing a select group of other readers to take away the heterodox teaching. In

other words, esotericism, broadly defined, means secretiveness in the communication of thought. Strauss's commentaries on writings of many philosophers were based on the esoteric principle that the surface meaning of the texts does not always indicate the real intention of the writers. According to Strauss, for reasons mostly related to religious and political persecution, these thinkers practiced esoteric techniques in their works to conceal their profound and subversive insights from the common reader. In other words, these thinkers are esoteric writers who convey their esoteric or hidden teaching only to a select group of readers who are familiar with the secretive or esoteric mode of communication. For this reason, Strauss argued that one must go beyond the surface and literal meaning of these writings to uncover the esoteric teaching. In the case of Alfarabi, Strauss claimed that contrary to what one might come to think from reading many traditional-looking passages, Alfarabi is a radically innovative and irreligious thinker who questions many principles of Islamic thought, including the immortality of the soul and the possibility of attaining happiness through religion.

In this regard, "Farabi's Plato" is a ground-breaking essay in Strauss's intellectual career. As I have tried to show, in this essay Strauss convincingly argues that Alfarabi's *The Philosophy of Plato* is of central importance for understanding Alfarabi's peculiar art of writing. Through his essay on Alfarabi, Strauss depicts common methods of esoteric writing. What Strauss calls Alfarabi's "eloquent" silence regarding immortality of the soul is one of the ways in which he points the knowledgeable reader to his esoteric knowledge. We can add this technique of esoteric writing to the importance of contradictions or blurred distinctions, and also the importance of what comes at the center of an enumeration or text. These techniques should be added to one general method that was discussed before: to state one's heterodox ideas by using someone as a mouthpiece, or to avail oneself of the immunity of a commentator, a narrator, or a mere expositor, thereby putting a distance between oneself and the opinions reflected in one's writing. Strauss's essay on Alfarabi also reveals the unique position which Medieval Islamic political philosophy occupies in Strauss's intellectual biography. It was because of the discoveries Strauss made while studying Alfarabi's writings that he learned about esoteric writing and applied his discoveries to medieval Jewish writings, classical Greek philosophy, and even to modern philosophical writings.

Notes

1. For an intelligent introduction to Strauss's thought see Michael Zuckert and Catherine Zuckert, *The Truth about Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy and American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Daniel Tanguay, *Leo Strauss: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. Christopher Nadon (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).
2. Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 22.
3. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing,* 24–25.
4. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing,* 33–34.
5. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing,* 34–36.
6. Leo Strauss, "On a Forgotten Kind of Writing," in *What Is Political Philosophy?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 221–22.
7. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 110–11.
8. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing,* 36–37.
9. Strauss was clearly aware of other kinds of esotericism because he writes that in contemporary discussions the "phenomenon in question is… discussed under the title 'mysticism.'" However, he tries to distinguish the philosophical esotericism from other non-philosophical types. See Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 111 n. 46.
10. Leo Strauss, "Exoteric Teaching," in *Reorientation: Leo Strauss in the 1930s*, ed. Hannes Kerber, Martin D. Yaffe, and Richard S. Ruderman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 275–87; Leo Strauss, "Lecture Notes for 'Persecution and the Art of Writing,'" in *Reorientation: Leo Strauss in the 1930s*, ed. Hannes Kerber, Martin D. Yaffe, and Richard S. Ruderman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 293–304.
11. Leo Strauss, "The Spirit of Sparta or the Taste of Xenophon," *Social Research* 6, no. 4 (1939): 502–36; Leo Strauss, "The Literary Character of the Guide for the Perplexed," in *Essays on Maimonides*, ed. S.W. Baron (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 37–91; Leo Strauss, "The Law of Reason in the Kuzari," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 13 (1943): 47–96; Leo Strauss, "On Classical Political Philosophy," *Social Research* 12, no. 1 (1945): 98–117; Leo Strauss, "Farabi's Plato," in *Louis Ginzberg: Jubilee Volume* (New York: The American Academy for Jewish Research, 1945), 357–93.
12. Hannes Kerber, "Strauss and Schleiermacher on How to Read Plato: An Introduction to 'Exoteric Teaching,'" in *Reorientation: Leo Strauss in the 1930s*, ed. Martin D. Yaffe and Richard S. Ruderman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 203–204.
13. Strauss, "Lecture Notes for 'Persecution and the Art of Writing,'" 297.

14. Jacob Klein (1899–1978) was a Russian-American philosopher and interpreter of Plato who was one of Strauss's closest friends. A student of Heidegger, Klein taught at St. John's College in Annapolis where Strauss was resident scholar at the end of his life.
15. Letters are available in Leo Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften—Band 3*, ed. Heinrich Meier and Wiebke Meier (Stuttgart-Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 2001), 544–87. The following letters discuss esotericism—major writers mentioned in the letters are indicated in the parenthesis: January 20, 1938 (Maimonides, Plato, Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, Proclus, Alfarabi, Averroes), February 16, 1938 (Maimonides, Averroes, Alfarabi, Voltaire, Nietzsche), July 23, 1938 (Maimonides, Nietzsche), October 15, 1938 (Plato, Herodotus), October 20, 1938 (Plato, Herodotus), November 2, 1938 (Herodotus, Thucydides, Plato), November 27, 1938 (Plato, Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon), December 2, 1938 (Maimonides, Aristotle, Xenophon, Plato, Thucydides, Sophocles), December 12, 1938 (Plato, Aristophanes), February 16, 1939 (Xenophon, Aristotle, Plato, Maimonides), February 28, 1939 (Plato, Xenophon), July 25, 1939 (Xenophon, Thucydides, Herodotus, Plato), August 7, 1939 (Xenophon), August 18, 1939 (Xenophon, Plato, Cervantes,), October 10, 1939 (Plato, Aristotle, Hesiod, Homer, Shakespeare, Parmenides, Thales), November 28, 1939 (Xenophon, Maimonides, Plato). For a discussion see Laurence Lampert, "Strauss's Recovery of Esotericism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*, ed. Steven B. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 63–93.
16. Lampert, "Strauss's Recovery of Esotericism," 63. Heinrich Meier here aptly speaks of "a whole series of philosophical supernovas." Heinrich Meier, "Vorwort des Herausgebers," in *Gesammelte Schriften—Band 3* (Stuttgart: Metzler Verlag, 2001), xxxiii.
17. Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften—Band 3*, 545.
18. Leo Strauss, *Die Religionskritik Spinozas als Grundlage seiner Bibelwissenschaft. Untersuchungen zu Spinozas theologisch-politischem Traktat* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1930), 147; Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften—Band 3*, 550.
19. Leo Strauss, *Philosophie und Gesetz. Beitrage zum Verständnis Maimunis und seiner Vorläufer* (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1935), 88, 99.
20. Strauss, *Philosophie und Geset*, 92.
21. Leo Strauss, "Quelques remarques sur la science politique de Maïmonide et de Fârâbî," *Revue des Etudes juives* 100 (1936): 1,2,6.
22. Strauss, "Quelques remarques sur la science politique," 14.
23. Strauss, "Quelques remarques sur la science politique," 22.
24. Leo Strauss, "Eine vermißte Schrift Farâbîs," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 80, no. 1 (1936): 105.

25. Strauss, 176; Leo Strauss, "A Lost Writing of Farabi's" (1936), in *Reorientation*: *Leo Strauss in the 1930s*, trans. Martin D. Yaffe and Gabriel Bartlett (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 265.
26. Leo Strauss, "Der Ort der Vorsehungslehre nach der Ansicht Maimunis," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 81 (N. F. 45), no. 1 (1937): 94, n. 1, 101.
27. Leo Strauss, "On Abravanel's Philosophical Tendency and Political Teaching," in *Isaac Abravanel*: *Six Lectures*, ed. J.B. Trend and H. Loewe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 99–101.
28. Leo Strauss, "The Secret Teaching of Maimonides (1937–40)," in *Leo Strauss on Maimonides*: *The Complete Writings*, ed. Kenneth Hart Green (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 615–19.
29. Daniel Tanguay, *Leo Strauss*: *An Intellectual Biography*, trans. Christopher Nadon (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).
30. Leo Strauss, "Preface to Hobbes Politische Wissenschaft," *Interpretation*: *A Journal of Political Philosophy* 8 (January 1979): 1.
31. Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, trans. E.M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 28–29; Leo Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*: *Contributions to the Understanding of Maimonides and His Predecessors*, trans. Eve Adler (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 29.
32. Strauss refrains from stating his reasons against a return to orthodoxy. Perhaps he believed that the return to orthodoxy was unacceptable because it would amount to sacrifice of human reason. See Tanguay, *Leo Strauss*, 48.
33. Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, 38.
34. Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, *Faith and Political Philosophy*: *The Correspondence Between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934–1964*, ed. Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 11–12.
35. *Philosophy and Law* (1935) which incorporates material from "Maimunis Lehre von der Prophetie und ihre Quellen" (1934) includes discussions of Islamic philosophy. "Eine vermißte Schrift Farabis" (1936) also discusses a then lost writing of Alfarabi, but it is rather limited in scope.
36. One should compare the history of the publication of "Farabi's Plato" with that of "The Spirit of Sparta or the Taste of Xenophon."
37. Strauss, "Farabi's Plato," 358.
38. This is the same work mentioned in "Eine vermißte Schrift Farâbîs." We can therefore see why the latter piece was never republished: it has fulfilled its purpose. But what about "Farabi's Plato?"
39. Strauss, "Farabi's Plato," 360.
40. Strauss, "Farabi's Plato," 359.
41. Strauss, "Farabi's Plato," 360.

42. Strauss, "Farabi's Plato," 361.
43. Strauss, "Farabi's Plato," 363.
44. Strauss, "Farabi's Plato," 366–68.
45. Strauss, "Farabi's Plato," 370.
46. The importance of the question of the immortality also shows itself by the fact that Strauss begins "Farabi's Plato" with the following quotation from Lessing's short treatise entitled *Leibnitz on Eternal Punishment*: "in another context, the same idea can have a completely different significance." Lessing is here arguing for the exoteric character of Leibnitz' defense of the immortality of soul. See Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, "Leibniz on Eternal Punishment," in *Lessing: Philosophical and Theological Writings*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 44.
47. Strauss, "Farabi's Plato," 375.
48. Strauss, "Farabi's Plato," 381.

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CHAPTER 8

Aleister Crowley and Islam

Marco Pasi

Although Islam played an important role in the life of the English occultist Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), scholars have not given much attention to the subject so far.[1] Crowley's relationship with Islam can be examined from two different angles, which could be called genealogical and cultural. On the one hand, one could simply wonder about the influence that Islam, as a complex of doctrinal, ritual, symbolic, mythical, and literary traditions, may have had on Crowley. This would not necessarily imply explicit and direct references to Islam by Crowley, since influence can sometimes follow silent paths. To give just one example, we could find structural similarities between Islam and Thelema, the new religion founded by Crowley, which would be strongly suggestive of a particular influence of one over the other, even if we do not know precisely which sources determined such influence.

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On the other hand, one could focus on how Crowley constructs a particular image of Islam, how he perceives it and understands it. Here, we would not be concerned so much with Islam as a historical phenomenon, but rather with the particular function that Islam, as an imaginative construction, had in Crowley's thinking. This construction then becomes the support for a vision that goes beyond the historical and concrete reality of Islam, being an idiosyncratic, subjective, and psychological reality. And yet, even while being subjective, this reality is not isolated from the outside world; it remains in a constant dialectical relationship with the cultural and social context in which Crowley happened to live and operate.

It seems to me that the second aspect is related to the problem of Orientalism, as it was originally posed by Edward Said in his famous book with the same title.[2] Said suggested that the essentialized idea of "the Orient" was very much the product of the European imagination, independent of whether it was based on a particular social and cultural reality. In this sense, we might see Crowley's perception of Islam, so clearly influenced by ideas and biases that were circulating in late nineteenth-century Britain, as a particular case of the cultural processes described by Said in his book. Said's critique of Orientalism, however, has been the object of a vast debate since the late 1970s.[3] The idea that Orientalism was functional to the construction of a sentiment of cultural superiority, and that it was an ally of the colonial establishment or of an imperialist agenda, has been criticized by several authors as being overly simplistic. It is certainly possible to see cases where visions of the Orient have played other roles in European culture. Crowley is exemplary here, because he represents, much like his hero, the Victorian explorer Richard Burton, a use of Orientalism for subversive purposes, or, in other words, "as a source of inspiration for Europeans who sought to challenge or enrich their own society," rather than to reinforce the values of the establishment.[4]

To return to the genealogical and cultural aspects of Crowley's relationship with Islam, it can be easily seen that the distinction between the two is purely abstract and artificial. In reality, the two levels constantly intersect and interact with each other. But I believe that, from a purely pragmatic point of view, the distinction will be useful here. For this reason, I will first address the presence of concepts and structures in Crowley's work that have a clear or at least very likely origin in Islam. This will allow us to evaluate the extent to which Crowley had an interest in and was influenced by Islam. If we can ascertain that this interest and influence was there and was quite significant, then we will have to move to the next

question, which is why this was so. In order to answer this question, a look at how Crowley perceived Islam and constructed his own personal vision of it on the basis of the suggestions offered by the cultural environment in which he moved will help to clarify the issue.

The Direct Experience of Islam

During much of his life, Crowley traveled a great deal, and he repeatedly visited countries with a predominant Muslim presence. Therefore, his knowledge of Islam was not exclusively, or even primarily, based on books, but was also derived from personal experiences and direct observations.

The first place of this direct contact was India, which Crowley visited several times between 1901 and 1905. This is when he discovered yoga and Buddhism, thanks to his friend and former fellow member of the Hermetic Order of Golden Dawn, Allan Bennett (1872–1923). In India, the presence of Islam was also very important. It should be remembered that this country, as a British colonial domain, at the time still included predominantly Muslim regions, which would later separate from India at the time of independence and subsequent partition, in 1947, and had also many Muslims in other predominantly non-Muslim regions. The second place was Egypt, for the first time in 1902, on his return from a long trip around the world; then twice in 1903 and 1904, during his honeymoon with his first wife, Rose Kelly. The third place was the Chinese province of Yunnan, which had a significant Muslim minority, and which Crowley traversed during a long journey on foot and on horseback in 1906. Finally, the fourth region visited by Crowley was the Maghreb, more particularly Morocco and Algeria several times between 1907 and 1914, and Tunisia between 1924 and 1926, after being expelled from Italy by Mussolini.

The motivations that led Crowley to travel and sometimes reside for some time in these countries are diverse, and one should not think that it was always sheer curiosity or sympathy for the Muslim world. For example, his main reason for spending long periods in Tunis between 1924 and 1926 was simply that life in Tunisia was much cheaper than in Europe, and especially in England. At a time when Crowley had run out of money and no longer had significant financial resources, the cost of living inevitably played an important role in this kind of choice. Very probably, the same reasons also explain why Crowley picked Cefalù, in Sicily, as a place to set up his Abbey of Thelema in 1920.

Crowley's sojourns in Egypt in 1904 and in Algeria in 1909 are of particular importance, since Crowley saw them as crucial moments in his spiritual or initiatory career. It was in Cairo that Crowley "received," in April 1904, the *Book of the Law*, which would later become the fundamental text of his new religion.[5] On the other hand, the significance of the 1909 trip to Algeria lies in the exploration that Crowley, accompanied by his disciple Victor Neuburg (1883–1940), made of the Enochian magic system of John Dee (1527–1608).[6] Crowley attributed great initiatory value to this series of magical operations.

Especially in the travels of his youth, that is to say until the trip to Algeria in 1909, Crowley seems to follow both the already well-honed model of the Victorian explorer and that of the modern tourist, which had by then developed well beyond the classic "Grand Tour" of Europe, and which, especially for English and French travelers, broadened its scope to include the vast spaces of colonial empires. In this context, it is no wonder to see Crowley's direct experience of exotic cultures as colored by the prejudices of the imperialist and colonial ideology of England at the time. The manner in which Crowley interprets the things he sees during these travels is not linear, but rather follows idiosyncratic paths. Early in his life Crowley had developed an extremely negative attitude toward Victorian culture, which had shaped him during his childhood and adolescence. Travel experiences and encounters with other cultures thus become an opportunity to develop a comparative perspective, which then turns into a tool to radically criticize his own culture.

We have here a first key for understanding Crowley's relationship with Islam, but also with the other religious traditions he encountered during his travels. His appreciation of these religious traditions must be seen within the broader context of his critique of Christianity and the values of Victorian society.[7] I will return to these "cultural" aspects of Crowley's relationship with Islam later in this chapter. But first I would like to move to the seemingly simpler question of the influence of Islam on his religious system: Thelema.

Thelema and Islam

As I said earlier, the key event of Crowley's spiritual life took place in Cairo in the spring of 1904, during his long honeymoon trip with his wife Rose.[8] At first sight, when we consider the relation between Thelema and the geographical and cultural context in which its revelation took place, we

would rather think of connecting it with the religion of ancient Egypt and its long-lasting legacy.[9] The symbolic and mythical universe of Crowley's new religion is in fact largely inspired by Egyptian ancient religious traditions, which was far from being uncommon in the occultism of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Europe. The symbolic and aesthetic imagination of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, in which Crowley had been initiated in 1898, drew much inspiration from ancient Egypt, and the Egyptian gods were very present in its rituals and teachings.[10] From this point of view, Crowley's new religion was built on the same mythical and symbolic ground as the Golden Dawn and could even be considered as an expansion of it. It is the god Horus who commands Rose to announce to her husband that a message of cosmic importance will soon be transmitted to him. Significantly, the recognition of the imminence of this message takes place in the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities in Cairo, when Crowley discovers, through his wife, a stele depicting the priest Ankh-ef-en-Khonsu, who had lived in Thebes between the end of the twenty-fifth and the beginning of the twenty-sixth dynasty (around 725 BC), and of whom Crowley came to believe to be a reincarnation. The very text of the *Book of the Law* presents itself literally as a message sent by Egyptian divinities (Nuit, Hadit, Ra-Hoor-Khuit) to announce the beginning of a new era, the Æon of Horus. This is all quite evident to those who take a look at the basic aspects of Crowley's religion. But, if we observe things a little closer, we realize that Thelema shows interesting analogies with Islam as well. The context of Egypt as the country where the "revelation" of the *Book of the Law* occurred can then take on another meaning. We see that Crowley, during his sojourns in Egypt, is interested not only in the ancient traditions of this country's multi-millennial past, but also in the contemporary living presence of Islamic culture.

So what are the similarities between Thelema and Islam? The first and perhaps most obvious one concerns the very revelation upon which the structure of Crowley's new religion is built. The primary foundation of both Islam and Thelema is a book revealed by a divine source to a man, who is selected by this source as the means of this extraordinary transmission and thus acquires the role of a prophet. This means also that the book is not a collection of texts written at different times by different men, as may be the case in some other religious traditions, but is a relatively compact text, which is supposed to include all that is essential in the religion of which it is the foundation. At the same time, both the Quran and the *Book*

of the Law do not have a narrative structure, such as the Torah or the New Testament, but rather an aphoristic one, and follow no apparent thematic or chronological order.[11] Furthermore, because both texts are believed to have a direct divine origin, they are considered to be immutable and should be preserved from any alteration or modification.[12]

In the very manner of the transmission of the text, we can also see interesting analogies. According to Islamic tradition, the origin of the Quranic revelation lies in communications that the Archangel Gabriel, as a messenger of God, makes to Muhammad during a series of spiritual retreats beginning in 610. From that moment, Gabriel communicates to Muhammad verses that would eventually be collected together and would constitute the Quranic text. We have a similar situation with the revelation of Thelema, since the text of the *Book of the Law* is dictated to Crowley by a preterhuman entity named Aiwass. The analogy goes even further if we consider that Crowley at some point came to believe that Aiwass was also, like Gabriel for Muhammad, an "angel," or more precisely his own "Holy Guardian Angel."[13]

These analogies should not obscure differences. While Muhammad receives the verses that are dictated to him but does not transcribe them himself (in the early period the verses were mostly handed down orally among his followers, and were transcribed in a definitive form only after his death), Crowley directly writes the text down as it is dictated by Aiwass. From this, another difference derives as to the duration of the composition of the text: the revelations of the Quranic verses continue for 23 years in the life of Muhammad, while the revelation of the *Book of the Law* takes place during three days, from April 8 to 10, 1904, in sessions of one hour on each day. The length of the two texts is therefore also very different: more than 6000 verses for the Quran, 218 verses for the *Book of the Law*.

Despite these obvious differences in format and size, the purpose of both books is the same: to bring a new religious message to the whole of humanity, a universal message that renders all previous religious revelations obsolete. It is a message that is in continuity with some of these earlier revelations, whose existence and validity are acknowledged, but which it now claims to surpass and supersede. This aspect will become even clearer when I discuss Crowley's notions of the Æons and of the Magi.

Apart from the way in which the revelation takes shape, there are some other affinities from the point of view of religious practice that seem to indicate an influence of Islam. There is, for example, the aspect of daily prayers (*ṣalāt*), which is one of the five pillars of faith in Islam. Every

Muslim believer is required to recite prayers a number of times at fixed times of the day (for Sunnis: dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and dusk). A similar practice can be found in Thelema with the "greetings of the Sun," which Crowley describes in "Liber Resh," one of the texts of instructions that are meant to accompany and complement the *Book of the Law*.[14] According to this text, Thelemites are supposed to "greet the Sun" four times a day with gestures and ritual words. The moments when this should be done (dawn, noon, sunset, midnight) partly correspond to those of the Islamic *ṣalāt*.

In other cases, we have not just a significant similarity, but a direct and clear reference to Islam. For instance, we find in Thelema the notion of *qibla*, the direction in which one must position oneself during certain ritual practices, which is clearly derived from Islam.[15] While Muslims should direct their prayers toward Mecca, Thelemites should orientate themselves, while performing some particular rituals, toward the property Crowley owned in Scotland as a young man, Boleskine House.[16] In some texts Crowley draws an explicit connection to the Islamic *qibla*: "Remember that your ' East,' your Kiblah, is Boleskine House."[17] Interestingly enough, this does not apply to the greetings of the Sun described in "Liber Resh," which simply follow the cardinal points according to the time of the day (dawn/East, noon/South, sunset/West, midnight/North), but rather to other rituals. One of them is the "Ritual of the Mark of the Beast," given in "Liber V vel Reguli" and described as an "incantation proper to invoke the Energies of the Æon of Horus."[18] During the performance of this ritual, the magician has to place himself in the direction of Boleskine at different moments. Another significant example is the Gnostic Mass, which is the most important communal ritual of Thelema, still regularly performed today in the Gnostic Catholic Church affiliated to the Ordo Templi Orientis and in other Thelemic organizations.[19] In this case, the "shrine or High Altar" of the ceremony is placed in the direction of Boleskine, as with the *miḥrāb* in a mosque.[20]

Related to the notion of Thelemic *qibla* is an interesting reference to the Kaaba in the *Book of the Law*. The Kaaba is the cubic building at the center of the Great Mosque of Mecca, which serves for the exact orientation of the Islamic *qibla* and around which millions of Muslim pilgrims circumambulate every year while performing the ritual duties of their pilgrimage. A verse in the *Book of the Law* mentions a similar place for Thelema: "Establish at thy Kaaba a clerk-house: all must be done well and with business way" (III:41). This verse is part of a series where

instructions are given to the prophet of Thelema, namely Crowley himself, about the publication of the *Book of the Law*. The verse seems to mean that Crowley should establish some sort of administrative place (a "clerk-house") as a center for the future spreading of Thelema. Because of the identification of Boleskine as the Thelemic *qibla*, it would be reasonable to assume that Boleskine is also the place referred to as the "Kaaba" in the verse. This is probably how Crowley originally understood it himself. But other interpretations were possible. In 1918, due to Crowley's by then very precarious financial situation, the estate of Boleskine had to be sold.[21] He then came to the conclusion that the Thelemic Kaaba should not necessarily be located there and that the "modern centralized business organization" he thought the verse was referring to could also be established elsewhere, at "any convenient headquarters."[22] With this interpretation, the notion of Thelemic "Kaaba" was effectively disassociated from a particular place, which made the difference from its Islamic model even more evident.[23]

Apart from these similarities and specific borrowings, we can also observe in Crowley's writings and in the founding texts of Thelema a more elaborate discourse on Islam, especially in the context of what we might call—to use Henry Corbin's term—the "hierohistory" of Thelema.[24] We must remember that, for Crowley, the religious history of humanity is divided into several great periods, called "Æons."[25] According to Crowley, we are now living at the end of one of these periods, the Æon of Osiris, which saw the birth and development of authoritarian religions. These are especially the great monotheisms, where God is perceived as a paternal figure. The societies that have developed in the framework of these great religions have emphasized the concepts of restriction, authority, or—as is especially the case with Christianity—sin. All this is going to change with the new, emerging Æon. It is indeed Horus, the son of Osiris, who defies the authority of the father and inaugurates an era based on the primacy of individual freedom. According to Crowley, Thelema is the religion that embodies the spirit of this new era. It will replace, over time, the religions of the Æon of Osiris and will become the dominant religion of humanity for the next 2000 years.

The doctrine of the Æons is complemented by that of the "Magi," which shows similarities to Édouard Schuré's (1841–1929) notion of the "Great Initiates," or, more generally, to the traditional chains of wise men of the *Prisca Theologia*.[26] For Crowley, the Magi, understood as high initiates, have regularly appeared in history in order to announce a new

spiritual message. They have therefore played a crucial role in the evolution of humanity.

We could see here a possible analogy with the Islamic notion of prophets and divine messengers (*rusul* and *anbiyā*), of whom Muhammad is considered to be the "seal," bringing their series to an end.[27] But, even if I would not exclude the possibility of an influence of this doctrine on Crowley, here again we should not lose sight of some significant differences. Generally, from an Islamic perspective, prophets and messengers are always sent by the unique and only God, so that various human communities can receive his message through their mediation in different times and places. This goes on until a final message is brought forth through Muhammad. For Crowley there is no single God at the origin of the Magi's revelations.[28] As we have seen, the *Book of the Law* presents itself as being a communication from a number of Egyptian gods. But, more generally, the prophets and the great spiritual teachers of humanity, or Magi, are supposed to be sent by a hidden organization that, from a higher dimension of reality, oversees the destiny of humanity: the Great White Brotherhood, whose members are also referred to by Crowley as the "Secret Chiefs."[29]

Furthermore, Crowley does not seem to believe that he is the prophet of a final revelation, in the same sense as Muhammad is considered by Muslims to be the "Seal of the Prophets." On the contrary, Crowley thinks that at some point another Æon, that of Ma (or Maʿat), the Egyptian goddess of justice, will follow that of Horus, and will presumably be based on a new revelation.[30]

As can be expected, given the occultist context to which Crowley belonged, religious revelation is for him closely related to the idea of initiation. In fact, it must be remembered that "Magus" is not understood here in the generic sense of "magician," but rather in a specific, technical sense, as the penultimate degree of the initiatory system of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, which Crowley adopted with some modifications when he created his own initiatory order, the Argenteum Astrum, or A.·.A.·..[31] It belongs therefore to the summit of this system, which is reserved for the small elite of the most advanced adepts.

In the system of the A.·.A.·. there is only one degree above the Magus, namely the "Ipsissimus," which appears to be the final stage in the process of divinization of the adept.[32] The idea that, in order to be a religious prophet or leader, one has to reach a particular initiatory grade may appear peculiar, and it was Crowley who introduced it into the original system of

the Golden Dawn. But it is interesting to see that a similar idea had also emerged in an Islamic context, even if far away in time from Crowley. We could find in fact something similar with the Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwan al-Safa'*), a secret group of philosophers active in the city of Basra during the tenth or eleventh century AD, authors of the important encyclopedic work, *The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*. The Brethren had their own hierarchical system of ranks, similar to initiatory degrees. The fourth rank was at the top of the system, consisting of "prophets and philosophers," which in the past had included, among others, pagan masters such as Socrates and Pythagoras.[33] In order to become a "prophet" one would have to reach the summit of this initiatory structure, as is the case for the Magi in the A.·.A.·..

According to Crowley, the list of Magi includes the following names: Lao Tzu, Gautama, Krishna, Dionysus, Tahuti (Thoth), Moses, and Muhammad.[34] To this list, Crowley obviously also adds his own name, since he considers himself as having reached the rank of Magus and therefore as possessing the required status for founding a new religion.[35]

Each of these Magi would have uttered a "Word" in which his spiritual message would have been encapsulated, as in a kind of cosmic magical formula.[36] In his *Liber Aleph*, written in 1918, Crowley claims that Muhammad's Word was, at least apparently, "ALLH," on which the "Doctrine of the Unity of God" is based.[37] Crowley, however, interprets this doctrine in his own peculiar way, and this is a crucial point for understanding his perception of Islam.

Crowley seems to think that there are two different levels of interpretation of the core message of Islam. The apparent one, which is good enough for the common believer, is that there is indeed a transcendent, almighty God, and that no other God exists. But then there is also a hidden one, according to which there is no such God, "for God is Man."[38] In other words, for Crowley the only God that really exists is the individual human being, who can discover his divine nature and reach a god-like condition at the end of a long initiatory journey.

According to Crowley, "[Muhammad's] Will was to unite all Men in One reasonable Faith: to make possible international Cooperation in Science."[39] That would be the actual purpose of the "Doctrine of the Unity of God." The real, if hidden, message of Islam would then not be radical monotheism, but a form of radical humanism, on the basis of which humanity would be able to unite in order to achieve scientific and cultural progress. And, Crowley adds, if there is a religious community that has

completely misunderstood the real meaning of Muhammad's message, that is the Christians, who followed "the Great Sorcerer of Nazareth" (i.e., Jesus) and were thus unable to perceive Muhammad's "true Self of Glory."[40]

Peculiar as it may seem, this interpretation of Islam has its own historical and cultural roots, which I will try to elucidate later in this chapter. What is important to note here is that the distinction between two levels of interpretation of the core message of Islam—one apparent and the other hidden—has its counterpart in a similar distinction Crowley makes for Muhammad's Word as a Magus. We saw that, according to Crowley, Muhammad's Word was "ALLH." But this Word hides in fact another, which is the real one: "Nevertheless, behold, o My Son, this Mystery. [Muhammad's] true Word was LA ALLH, that is to say: (there is) No God."[41]

What Crowley is doing here is clear enough: he is taking only the first two words of the *shahāda*, the Islamic profession of faith ("[I bear witness that there is] no god but God [and that] Muhammad is the messenger of God") and is obliterating the rest.[42] As a result, we find the idea that Muhammad's true message was not that there is a unique God, but rather its opposite, that there is *no* God. And, as we have seen, this is based on an apparent paradox: there is no God simply because God is Man.

Significantly, Crowley's interpretation of Muhammad's message comes back again elsewhere in his works, but applied this time only to Thelema. This seems to imply a very interesting continuity between Islam and Thelema. In his "Liber Oz," first published in 1941, Crowley presents a sort of declaration of human rights based on Thelemic principles.[43] Here, the formula "There is no God but Man" features prominently in the text, but this time without any explicit reference to Muhammad or the Islamic *shahāda*. However, considering Crowley's speculations about Muhammad's "true Word" in *Liber Aleph*, it becomes difficult not to see an implicit connection which is also confirmed elsewhere in Crowley's writings. For instance, in one of his comments to the *Book of the Law*, he calls Muhammad a "forerunner" of Thelema.[44]

Crowley's interpretation of the *shahāda*, negating God's existence and replacing it with a mix of freethinking atheism and radical humanism inspired by occult beliefs, is obviously quite heterodox from a mainstream Islamic perspective. But it resonates with ideas that were circulating widely in Western progressive milieus in Crowley's times. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) is an author that comes immediately to mind, with his

proclamation of the death of God and his search for the *Übermensch*.[45] And it is indeed remarkable that, in a modern Islamic context, we find philosophical reflections combining Nietzsche with the *shahāda* in ways that may be suggestively juxtaposed with Crowley's line of thinking.

This is for instance what we can see in the work of Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), the celebrated Muslim poet, philosopher, and political activist from pre-partition India who is an almost exact contemporary of Crowley. In his poetical work *Javid-Nama* (1932), written in Persian and partly inspired by Dante's *Divina Commedia*, Iqbal imagines traveling through the celestial spheres and meeting and conversing with important personalities of the past, mostly Islamic.[46] One of them, however, is not Islamic: it is Nietzsche, whose thought had a profound influence on Iqbal. The encounter with Nietzsche is important for the reflections it generates about the *shahāda*, and more specifically about the possible contrast between the two parts "There is no god" and "but God," on which there was already a long tradition of mystical speculations even before Iqbal.[47] Reflecting on how the two parts of the *shahāda* could be applied to the thought of the German philosopher, Iqbal observes that "' no' and ' but' are of the stations of the Self," and that Nietzsche "remained fast in ' no' and did not reach ' but.'"[48] In other words, he got stuck in the first half of the sentence, the apparent negation of God, and could not move on to the second one, the affirmation of the uniqueness of God, because "his eyes desired no other vision but man; fearlessly he shouted, ' Where is man?'"[49]

We find an uncanny resemblance here between Crowley and the Nietzsche portrayed by Iqbal: a resemblance that is not casual, but points to a cultural climate that Iqbal had observed in Europe and that he wanted to address from his own particular perspective. For him, as a Muslim reflecting on the problems of modernity, the inability to reach the "but" of the *shahāda* is a crucial flaw, and yet he acknowledges the tragic grandeur of Nietzsche's vision, even comparing him to the Persian Sufi al-Hallaj (857–922).[50] For Crowley, as for Iqbal's Nietzsche, the negation of God is a necessary step toward the affirmation of Man, which is a moment of universal emancipation, liberation, and progress. Crowley's emancipatory, if evidently partial, interpretation of the basic tenets of Islam is perfectly consonant with his idea that Islam is a virile religion for free men, as opposed to Christianity, which is a religion for the "slaves." Nietzsche's shadow can be easily perceived here, and makes a comparison with Iqbal's discussion of his ideas quite intriguing.

In spite of all these evident examples of positive appreciation by Crowley, we should not forget that, from a Thelemic perspective, Islam remains a religion born in an age that has now come to a close and that has been superseded by a new one. In the third chapter of the *Book of the Law*, the religions of the previous era, the Æon of Osiris, are attacked rather violently. Islam is not spared: "I flap my wings in the face of Mohammed & blind him," says the god Horus.[51] But in one of his comments on the *Book of the Law*, Crowley explains that this verse implies no harsh judgment on Islam, as is the case with Christianity:

> Mohammed's point of view is wrong too; but he needs no such sharp correction as 'Jesus.' It is his face—his outward resemblance—that is to be covered with His wings. The tenets of Islam, correctly interpreted, are not far from our Way of Life and Love and Liberty. This applies especially to the secret tenets. The external creed is mere nonsense suited to the intelligence of the peoples among whom it was promulgated; but even so, Islam is magnificent in practice. Its code is that of a man of courage and honour and self-respect; contrasting admirably with the cringing cowardice of the damnation-dodging Christians with their unmanly and dishonest acceptance of vicarious sacrifice, and their currish conception of themselves as "born in sin," "miserable sinners" with "no health in us."[52]

Two points need to be noted here. The first one is that Crowley stresses the particular position of Islam with respect to the general condemnation of pre-Thelemic religions, as found in the *Book of the Law*. Some older religions are worse than others: Christianity, for instance, is defined by Crowley as an "unmanly" religion in comparison to Islam. We find here again a characterization of Christianity that has an evident Nietzschean flavor.

Secondly, we find here again the distinction between the "outward resemblance" of Islam (represented, by way of a synecdoche, by Muhammad's face) and its "secret tenets" which we had already encountered in *Liber Aleph*. The idea that religions have different teachings or doctrines for different levels of understanding obviously has a long history in Western culture, and is in fact at the very origin of the concept of esotericism.[53] But it is especially during the early Enlightenment that its political implications were drawn and brought to their radical consequences. This led some European intellectuals, such as John Toland (1670–1722), to believe that the core message of Islam could be found in its esoteric traditions, that this message actually coincided with these intellectuals'

ideal of true religion (Deism, in Toland's case), and that it could be used to undermine the perceived aberrations of Christianity.[54] Keeping this pattern in mind, we find that Crowley's perception of Islam, and its subversive use toward cultural and religious criticism, could also be seen as a twentieth-century continuation of a much older intellectual tradition. I will return later to these two points.

Before moving on to the cultural aspects underlying Crowley's idea of Islam, it is important to note that themes inspired by Islam and the history of the Middle East are also found in the structure and rituals of the Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO), the occultist organization founded by Theodor Reuss (1855–1923) in the years around 1910.[55] Crowley was invited by Reuss to join the order in the same year, and succeeded him as international leader after his death in 1923. Quickly enough, Crowley came to see the OTO as an important tool for the propagation of his new religion.

The story of the OTO rituals is complicated and has not yet been completely elucidated.[56] What needs to be said here is that Crowley wrote and then kept revising the rituals at various moments during the 1910s. However, his work originally was not meant for the OTO, but for another fringe Masonic body: the Antient and Primitive Rite of Masonry, which was then led by John Yarker (1833–1913), with whom Crowley came also in contact in 1910. Yarker was at the center of a vast Masonic network, attracting persons particularly interested in esoteric and exotic forms of Freemasonry. His Antient and Primitive Rite was a synthesis of Scottish Freemasonry (the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite) and the so-called Egyptian rites of Memphis and Mizraim.[57] Reuss was also part of Yarker's network, and collaborated closely with him.

It was under Yarker's impulsion that Crowley began to work on the rituals of the Antient and Primitive Rite.[58] Significantly, this work started during his second trip to Algeria, in December 1910, on which he was accompanied again by his disciple Victor Neuburg.[59] Crowley notes in his autobiography that he had brought with him "in the desert the rituals of Freemasonry, those of the Scottish, Memphis and Mizraim Rites," and that a "plan had already been mooted for [him] to reconstruct Freemasonry."[60] In 1912 Reuss appointed Crowley head of a newly created branch of the OTO for all English-speaking countries, and in 1913 Yarker died. The "plan to reconstruct Freemasonry" therefore took a different course, and the rituals Crowley later produced were meant for the OTO.[61]

The setting of the initiation rituals of the Minerval (a preliminary degree) and then of the first three degrees (I, II, and III) of the OTO is

located in the Egyptian desert, with the Muslim military leader and sultan Saladin (1137–1193) playing the role of the initiating master.[62]

This reference to one of the most important Muslim leaders from the period of the Crusades is obviously significant in the context of an occultist order inspired by the neo-Templar tradition.[63] The fact that the organization in question is defined as the Order of the "Eastern" Temple is reminiscent of legends on the contacts and possible influences of Islam on the Templar knights. Rather than emphasizing the Christian identity of the latter, Crowley, with these references to Islam and Arab culture, seems to give an image of the Templars as builders of bridges between different religious and spiritual traditions. When Crowley became the leader of the English-speaking branch of the OTO in 1912, he took the mystical name of "Baphomet," the famous idol that the Templars had been accused of worshiping and which was used as a charge in the trial against them.[64] Although Crowley does not refer to an explicit connection, it is also interesting that, as had already been suggested in medieval sources and as most historians today seem to accept, "Baphomet" is in fact a corruption of "Mahomet," implying a secret, heretical adoption of Islamic beliefs by the Templars.[65] It is not so surprising then to find an Islamic leader such as Saladin having the main role in these rituals, or, as we will see, the Sufi martyr al-Hallaj being mentioned as an inspiring model.

It is also a very significant coincidence that, right after his 1910 trip to Algeria, Crowley wrote a drama, "The Scorpion," whose plot is set at the time of the Crusades.[66] In the story a Knight Templar, Sir Rinaldo de la Chapelle, seduces Laylah, the newly wed wife of an Arabian Emir, Said Omar. In spite of her married condition, Rinaldo tries to seduce her, while explaining to her that their love might be the beginning of a new era of peace and understanding between Christians and Muslims. They end up making love, but their encounter remains brief and their love impossible, even if a child is eventually born from it. After a series of vicissitudes, the story ends in disaster forty years later, with Laylah killing her own son and being burnt at the stake as a witch by the Christians. At that moment, Rinaldo recognizes her and joins her in the flames out of love. The drama, which does not seem to have attracted much attention by commentators so far, may not be Crowley's literary masterpiece, but clearly shows his interest in the Knights Templar as a symbol of religious and cultural transgression in the context of their encounter with Islam. And, as a prefiguration of the OTO rituals he was beginning to write at this time, the drama

ends with the sudden apparition of a child who turns out to be none other than the future Saladin.[67]

We should also note the relatively unexpected role played in one of the OTO rituals by al-Hallaj. In the ritual for the initiation to the III degree al-Hallaj appears as a symbolic equivalent of Hiram Abif, the legendary architect of Solomon's Temple, whose myth of murder and resurrection is at the core of the ritual for the degree of Master Mason in Craft Masonry.[68]

It is important to note that the conspicuous presence of themes related to Islam and the Middle East in the rituals of the OTO is not just an idiosyncratic brainchild of Crowley's. It is in fact part of a broader context of Islamophilia that had spread, between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in the esoterically oriented Masonic milieus that I have already mentioned and from which the OTO emerged.[69] It was through this Masonic network that Crowley got in contact with Abdullah Quilliam (1856–1932), an Englishman who had become the most prominent public advocate of Islam in Britain after his conversion in 1887. Quilliam does not seem to have been particularly interested in Islamic mysticism and did not play any particular role in the introduction of Sufism to Western audiences, but he certainly had a long-standing interest in Freemasonry and joined several fringe Masonic bodies, including Yarker's Antient and Primitive Rite.[70] There is no indication that Crowley and Quilliam ever had a close relationship, but they collaborated with each other when the succession to Yarker as head of the Antient and Primitive Rite had to be handled after his death in 1913.[71]

I do not think, as Patrick Bowen suggests, that Crowley "became more and more fascinated with the Islamic world" as a result of these encounters,[72] since it should be clear by now that his fascination with Islam had begun earlier and had more distant roots. But surely Crowley's involvement in this Masonic networks helps to understand some aspects of his own Islamophilia and the role it played in the production of the OTO rituals.

Another interesting example of the presence of themes derived from Islam in the history and structure of the OTO is the fact that, in a series of letters written at the end of his life, Crowley explains to his American disciple Grady Louis McMurtry (1918–1985) that he sees his successor at the head of his magical organizations and in the propagation of the Thelema as a "Caliph."[73] This is easily explained by way of an analogy with Islam: Muhammad was not only the prophet of Islam, but also the political leader of the Islamic community, and his successors took the title of

"Caliph," from the Arabic word *khalīfa*, meaning successor. Similarly, Crowley considered himself the prophet of Thelema and the leader of the Thelemic community, and could therefore give the same title of Caliph to his successors. In the 1970s, McMurtry revived the OTO, which, apart from a few exceptions, had virtually ceased all activity after the death of Crowley's direct successor, the German Karl Germer (1885–1962). In order to do that, McMurtry relied on those letters and adopted the title of "Caliph" that Crowley had mentioned to him. This explains why the revived OTO was called, at least for a time, "Caliphate OTO," also to distinguish it from other competing branches that existed at the time. The reference to the Caliphate was later dropped and would certainly be less convenient to use today, as it might easily lend itself, after the proclamation in 2014 of the "Caliphate" of the Islamic State (Daesh), to unpleasant associations.

The Cultural Aspects and Burton's Model

The close analysis I have carried out so far allows us to see a clear Islamophile aspect in Crowley's work and ideas, an aspect that had remained largely under-appreciated until now. How can we better understand the cultural context of this Islamophilia? I would suggest that, in order to give an answer to this question, we should begin by looking at a Victorian author who was an inspiring model of primary importance for Crowley: Sir Richard F. Burton (1821–1890).[74]

Explorer, secret agent, diplomat, translator of Oriental texts (*The Thousand and One Nights*, the *Kama Sutra*),[75] writer, polyglot, Burton combined his many talents and his strong personality with an uncompromising critical attitude toward contemporary British culture and society.[76] Crowley's admiration for Burton is immense and quite explicit,[77] but his connection with him goes beyond the mere reading of his works. It must be noted that there was also a more personal and direct link, through his friend and mentor Oscar Eckenstein (1859–1921).[78] Eckenstein, an Englishman of German Jewish origin, was a railway engineer and an experienced alpinist, having participated in a major expedition to the Himalayas in the early 1890s.[79]

Crowley met Eckenstein in 1898. The two became friends out of their common passion for high mountains and began to practice mountaineering together, first in the Alps, then in Mexico in 1900. In 1902, Crowley

took part in an expedition organized by Eckenstein to conquer the summit, still virgin at the time, of K2, in the Karakoram. The attempt failed, but Crowley's admiration and friendship for Eckenstein were unaffected, making him one of the few persons about whom Crowley never modified his admiring and respectful opinion. But Eckenstein had, besides the mountains, another passion: Richard Burton. It is quite possible that Eckenstein had met Burton personally, but if this ever happened, no trace of it can be found in the many biographies that have been devoted to the British explorer. What is certain is that Eckenstein devoted a real cult to Burton and put together a very important collection of papers, documents, and books related to him, which was given after Eckenstein's death to the Royal Asiatic Society and remains today the most important collection of Burtoniana kept in a public institution.[80]

It is very significant that Crowley dedicated his autobiography, his famous *Confessions*, not only to Eckenstein and Bennett, but also to Burton.[81] The dedication shows that these three persons were perceived by Crowley as spiritual fathers who had marked him deeply in his youthful years. But Crowley's tribute to Burton goes further, since he also gives him, like Muhammad, the title of "Saint" of his Gnostic Catholic Church.[82]

It would be difficult to understand Crowley's interpretation of Islam without putting it against the background of Burton's influence. The analogies between Burton and Crowley are numerous and significant, and they are to a large extent based on a conscious attempt by Crowley to follow in Burton's footsteps. There was, of course, the love for traveling in and exploring exotic countries, which was sparked by a deep-seated curiosity about non-European cultures. But it must be noted that this curiosity, for both Burton and Crowley, did not content itself with simple observations from the outside: it also moved toward an identification with the observed culture. On some occasions, this may have depended on the need to avoid being perceived as a non-Muslim while traveling. The most obvious example of this situation is the famous pilgrimage of Burton to Mecca in 1853, a pilgrimage that the British explorer could not carry out without disguising himself, while traveling, as a pious Muslim.

But this is not the only reason. There seems to be also the will to see the world with the eyes of the other, which sometimes leads to discoveries beyond the reach of an emotionally distant, neutral observer. This method may help one to relativize one's culture of origin. For Crowley, as for Burton, the direct contact with Islam leads to a questioning of the superiority of European culture over the populations subjected to colonial

domination, which was practically taken for granted in England and other European countries at the time. On the other hand, Crowley also seems to attribute a spiritual meaning to the practice of shifting identities and disguising himself. The true magician is one who has seen everything, felt everything, experienced everything from the most diverse points of view. In order to do that, he has to divest oneself of his own personality and take on a new one.[83] This explains why Crowley so enthusiastically adopted Burton's practice of "cultural crossdressing," while also giving a new esoteric meaning to it.[84]

Crowley sometimes follows Burton's example to the tiniest detail. During his stay in Egypt in 1904, the same one during which the *Book of the Law* was written, Crowley decided to take on the identity of a Persian prince.[85] This was the same disguise Burton had chosen at the beginning of his journey to Mecca, while on his way to Egypt.[86] But even if the immediate source of Crowley's idea is found in Burton, it should be noted that other authors of the Victorian era had experienced the practice of disguise in an Islamic country. Before Burton, the most significant case was undoubtedly that of Edward William Lane (1801–1876), who lived for a long time in Cairo and became the author of a famous study on contemporary Egypt.[87] Lane had already had the idea of dressing as an Egyptian Muslim, not as the result of a conversion, but rather in order to better understand the customs and religious traditions of the Egyptian population. A deep and direct knowledge of the social and religious reality of Egypt was gained through the experience of total immersion in such reality. This allowed him to enter places, whether physical or cultural, that would otherwise be inaccessible to a non-Muslim European man.[88]

Said discusses the camouflage strategy of Westerners living in Oriental lands, and rightly points out that one should not forget its ambiguities and complex psychological presuppositions.[89] On the one hand, such a strategy was based on the intention to deceive the people one observed in order to obtain practical knowledge about their culture and customs. This eventually flowed into publications that could easily be used by colonial institutions for their own purposes. On the other hand, this process was accompanied by an obvious and sincere sympathy for the religious traditions and culture of the observed people. This was the case with Lane and Burton, and it was clearly also the case with Crowley. With the latter, however, the ambiguity was even more complex, since he was obviously much less involved than Burton in the colonial establishment of his day,

and so could present his behavior not as a professional necessity or obligation, but more trivially as a divertissement.

In his autobiography, Crowley describes his disguise as a Persian prince during his stay in Cairo in 1904 in this way:

> I was not for a moment deceived by my own pretext that I wanted to study Mohammedism [*sic*], and in particular the mysticism of the fakir, the Darwesh and the Sufi, from within, when I proposed to pass myself off in Egypt for a Persian prince with a beautiful English wife. I wanted to swagger about in a turban with a diamond aigrette and sweeping silken robes or a coat of cloth of gold, with a jeweled talwar by my side and two gorgeous runners to clear the way for my carriage through the streets of Cairo.[90]

Crowley is certainly aware of Lane's and Burton's precedents, but he presents his behavior in Cairo as a simple narcissistic joke, minimizing its intellectual or religious dimension. But one must always be wary of Crowley's mocking attitude, which often conceals more stratified intentions. It is indeed only a page later that Crowley returns to his motivations during his stay in Cairo with a different tone:

> As to my study of Islam, I got a sheikh to teach me Arabic and the practices of ablution, prayer and so on, so that at some future time I might pass for a Moslem among themselves. I had it in my mind to repeat Burton's journey to Mecca sooner or later. I learnt a number of chapters of the Koran by heart. I never went to Mecca, it seemed rather vieux jeu, but my ability to fraternize fully with Mohammedans has proved of infinite use in many ways.[91]

As we will see, this sheikh taught Crowley more than just basic notions of Arabic language and Islamic ritual practices. For now, it is important to note that this immersion in Islam, which seems to have been much more serious than the preceding passage would have suggested, occurs just before the revelation of the *Book of the Law*. I have already pointed out that, with respect to the similarities between Thelema and certain aspects of Islam, this proximity does not appear quite so trivial. Moreover, after this first learning process, Crowley claims to have exploited his knowledge of the religious practices of Islam during other travels to Muslim countries, which may well help in understanding the similarities between Islam and Thelema we have seen. This is the case, for example, with an episode from his first trip to Algeria in the company of his disciple Victor Neuburg, in 1909:

> On one occasion, in fact, a quarrel in a coffee shop having developed into a sort of small riot, and knives being drawn, I walked into the scrimmage and drew sigils in the air with the ring while intoning a chapter of the Koran. The fuss stopped instantly, and a few minutes later the original parties to the dispute came to me and begged me to decide between them, for they saw that I was a saint. I habitually observed the prescribed five prayers of the orthodox Mohammedan, and increased my reputation for piety by constantly reciting the Koran as I walked and performing various other practices proper to the highest class of dervish.[92]

It is remarkable to see how Crowley, in this episode, does not really use his practical knowledge of Islam in order to become less conspicuous as a Westerner, as had often been the case with Burton's practice of camouflage, but rather to dramatically impress the local population and show them the extent of his mastery of their own spiritual traditions. The episode of course also gives an indication of Crowley's interest in Sufism and Islamic mysticism, to which I will return.

Another point of contact between Burton and Crowley is how their perception of Islam mixes with their interest in sexuality. It is too easy to interpret this interest as a manifestation of lascivious and pornographic curiosity. There is also a political and cultural dimension that is at the center of Burton's and Crowley's concerns, and which has been, especially in the case of Crowley, so frequently missed by critics. The interest in sexuality is only another aspect of their dissatisfaction with Western culture and Christianity, and more particularly with the form that sexuality has taken on in the more specific context of Victorian society. As is well known, in the last years of his life Burton translated and published classical texts of Indian and Arabic erotic literature, such as the *Kama Sutra* and Sheikh Nefzaoui's *Perfumed Garden*.[93] His purpose was far from being purely scholarly: this literature was supposed to offer an image of Oriental sexuality that was free from the restraints of sin and of the sense of guilt typical of Western culture. The study of Eastern erotic cultures and the curiosity for exotic sexual practices led Burton, and then Crowley in his wake, to develop a more or less explicit critique of their society, a critique that anticipates in many ways the sexual revolution of the 1960s.

Based on an approach inspired, among others, by Michel Foucault and his *Histoire de la sexualité*, Hugh B. Urban has drawn attention to the fact that the occultist sexual magic that developed in North America and Europe from the mid-nineteenth century on is in fact a much more

complex cultural phenomenon than hitherto recognized.[94] Occultists such as Crowley introduce the conscious and systematic use of sex within the larger framework of more traditional magical practices. At the same time, late nineteenth-century esotericism creates a discourse on sexuality which, calling into question the moral values and social norms current at the time, radically anticipates the development of European culture in the twentieth century.[95] While I certainly subscribe to Urban's interpretation, I also find his focus on India, and more particularly on the traditions of Tantra and Haṭha Yoga, somewhat reductive. It is obvious that, for occultists interested in the spiritual and magical aspects of sexuality, Islam plays an equally important role. One only needs to think, apart from Crowley, of the American occultist Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825–1875), who claimed to have learned his sexual magic techniques while traveling in the Middle East, thanks to his encounter with the mysterious Nuṣayrīs (also known as Alawites) from Syria and Lebanon.[96]

For Crowley, who also follows Burton's example, the challenge to Victorian attitudes toward sexuality is not just about heterosexual eroticism, but extends to homosexuality. Homosexuality was perceived as particularly disturbing and offensive by Victorian culture, even if it was relatively tolerated in practice, provided it did not become the object of a public scandal, as was famously the case with Oscar Wilde's prosecution for "gross indecency" in 1895.[97] Burton played an important role in how the discourse on homosexuality developed in late nineteenth-century Britain. His influence on Crowley is quite evident in this respect.[98] Crowley, following Burton and other contemporary authors of clandestine and pornographic literature, attributes to Arab and Islamic cultures a particular propensity for the practice of sodomy.[99] For Crowley, who was bisexual and had various sexual and romantic experiences with men during his life, this view of Islam had rather positive connotations, even if his attitude toward homosexuality remained ambivalent.[100]

In 1910, Crowley published *The Scented Garden of Abdullah the Satirist of Shiraz*, which presents itself as the translation of a series of Persian *ghazals*, or love poems, that glorify homosexuality in a very explicit way.[101] The book was published clandestinely and was considered pornographic by the British authorities, who confiscated and destroyed all the copies that happened to fall into their hands, so that the first edition of this book, printed in only a hundred copies, is today extremely rare. At first sight, the title would seem to refer quite transparently to Burton's translation of the famous erotic textbook of Sheikh Nefzaoui, *The Perfumed Garden*, but we

can notice at least two important differences between the two texts.[102] The first is that Crowley's book is not a translation of a pre-existing text, but is, in fact, entirely written by him.[103] It is pseudonymously attributed to a Persian author of the early seventeenth century, Abdullah el-Haji. The name of this fictitious author is in fact Crowley's nod to connoisseurs of Burton's work, since Burton had taken on the identity of a Persian Sufi named Abdullah for the final part of his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1853.[104] The second difference is that the version of Nefzaoui's *Perfumed Garden* published by Burton was about heterosexual love, and did not include a discussion of homosexuality.

This last difference indicates that Crowley, with the title of his book, was obviously referring to a new edition of Nefzaoui's book that Burton was preparing in the last years of his life. This new edition, which Burton did not manage to publish before his death, would have included a section on homosexual practices. Significantly, the title of this new edition would have been *The Scented Garden*, which is the title Crowley used for his own book. Burton's manuscript was burnt after his death by his wife Isabel and is therefore now lost.[105]

It is also important to remember that, apart from the *Scented Garden* project of his final years, Burton shows a persistent interest in homosexuality in some of his other writings. Indeed, it is well known that in the first edition of *The Thousand and One Nights*, which he originally published in ten volumes in 1885, he devotes a substantial part of his "Terminal Essay" at the end of the last volume to the subject of "pederasty."[106] Burton presents there his theory that pederasty is a common practice especially in the latitudes closest to the tropics, which he calls "the Sotadic Zone." So there seems to be some kind of identification between an area corresponding to a significant extent to Islamic countries and the practice of pederasty.[107]

Crowley's *Scented Garden* may simply appear to be a very elaborate pornographic joke. But that would be reductive: its explicit exaltation of pederasty and sodomy is combined with insights about mystical illumination that should be placed within the broader context of Crowley's esoteric ideas. Although it has attracted less attention than other works by Crowley, it possesses literary quality and was certainly considered an important work by its author.[108] The tradition of mystical love poetry, especially of a homoerotic nature, in Persian literature had found a receptive audience in Britain in the nineteenth century.[109] In creating his own original work, Crowley exploits the Orientalist impulse of such an interest, while satirizing it at the same time. And the underlying message is clear:

what is perceived and even persecuted as an aberrant practice in a Christian context can be joyously glorified with beautiful poetry in an Islamic one. The vision of an exotic sexuality free from the sense of sin contrasts starkly with the restrictions of Victorian society. Burton's researches and publications about Oriental sexual customs had had a similar subversive goal.[110]

Significantly, the idea that homosexuality can express itself much more freely in an Islamic context than in a Christian one does not lead Crowley to perceive Islam as a religion with effeminate qualities: quite the contrary. In fact, Crowley often describes Islam as an eminently virile religion. This gendered perception of a religious tradition has to be placed back into the colonial, Orientalist context of nineteenth-century Britain. It was indeed a common cultural trope at the time to depict Hindus, and particularly Bengalis, as an effeminate, weak population, and to contrast them not only with the "muscular Christianity" of British colonizers, but also with the virile energy of Muslims.[111] This gendering of colonized populations had its roots in older debates during the Enlightenment, when Britain's colonial enterprise in India was gaining momentum.[112]

For Crowley, however, Christianity does not show any "muscular" qualities at all, and compares quite unfavorably to Islam, which seems to undermine contemporary ingrained notions of Western superiority. We have already seen that Crowley characterizes Christianity as a religion for "slaves," which points to a possible influence of Nietzsche. Other examples of this characterization can be given. For Crowley, "the manliness of the Mohammedan makes it impossible to despise his belief in Allah. Islam is free from the degrading doctrine of atonement and the glorification of the slave virtues."[113] Burton had also insisted that Islamic doctrines were largely superior to Christian ones in "morality and manly dignity."[114]

The Role of Sufism

We have noticed the importance that Crowley gives to the "secret tenets" of Islam, as distinct from the "mere nonsense" of its vulgar, exoteric form. It is therefore no wonder that he would also be interested in Sufism. And in fact we should pay attention to the fact that the sheikh who was teaching him the rudiments of the Arabic language and the Islamic faith in Egypt in 1904 also had other teachings to impart:

> My sheikh was profoundly versed in the mysticism and magic of Islam, and discovering that I was an initiate, had no hesitation in providing me with

> books and manuscripts on the Arabic Cabbala. … From this man I learnt also many of the secrets of the Sidi Aissawa; how to run a stiletto through one's cheek without drawing blood, lick red-hot swords, eat live scorpions, etc.[115]

The Aissawa ('Isawiyya) is an important Sufi brotherhood mainly based in Morocco, but present also in other countries of the Maghreb. The brotherhood is known for its use of dances and, in some particular cases, self-injury in order to produce trance-like states.[116] After his first acquaintance with their practices in 1904 through the Cairo sheikh, Crowley had a more direct experience of them in 1907, during a trip to Morocco. In his autobiography he tells how one night he stumbled almost by chance on the ritual performances of a local Aissawa community and was able to join the audience undetected.[117] The almost brutal frenzy of the ritual, with practitioners hitting themselves on the head with small ceremonial axes until bleeding, captured and excited him. The episode was certainly interesting for Crowley, even if he does not seem to have given a profound spiritual meaning to it: "This little adventure always stood out as one of the most exciting (in a small way) of my life, that is, of merely material adventures."[118]

When it comes to a deeper intellectual interest in Sufism, it is rather in the direction of Persia that Crowley looked than the Maghreb. After a failed attempt at climbing Kangchenjunga in 1905, Crowley was resting in Darjeeling and considering his future plans: "I had been reproaching myself for my ignorance of the Sufi doctrines, and intended to cross Persia on my way back to England. For this purpose, I began to study the language with a munshi. I began to imitate the poets of Iran."[119] He never went to Persia in the end, but this was the beginning of the literary project of *The Scented Garden*:

> Persian fascinated me more than any other language had ever done and I reveled in the ideas of the Sufis. Their esoteric symbolism delighted me beyond measure. I took it into my head to go one better than my previous performance in the way of inventing poets and their productions.[120]

We understand from these quotes that *The Scented Garden* for Crowley was not simply a literary project with pornographic and satirical contents but had a deeper meaning. And this meaning was closely associated with his interest in Sufism and Islamic mysticism. Crowley's *Scented Garden* can

then be compared in this respect not so much to Burton's erotic works, but to a poem Burton published pseudonymously in his later years, *The Kasīdah*.[121] The poem is attributed to a certain "Haji Abdu El-Yezdi," who is none other than Burton himself.[122] It enjoyed quite some popularity between 1900 and the Second World War, but its fortune declined thereafter and is certainly not Burton's best remembered work today. Crowley knew it very well and, although devoid of erotic elements, it is fair to assume that some of its formal aspects inspired him when writing *The Scented Garden*.[123] Burton wrote his *Kasīdah* around the time in which Edward Fitzgerald's version of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* had become a literary sensation, both in Britain and elsewhere, and had deeply influenced the way in which the West would understand Sufism.[124] The author is introduced as a Sufi, like the pseudonymous author of Crowley's *Scented Garden*, and the poem offers an overview of Burton's opinions on science, religion, and the mysteries of life, even if they are presented as coming from a Sufi perspective.[125] The doctrine of Burton's imagined Sufism is based on moral relativism and skepticism: there is no transcendent God, there is no afterlife, there is no absolute Good or Evil. Life makes sense only as a progressive discovery of one's self.[126] Man is the creator of God: "I am the Truth! I am the Truth! We hear the God-drunk Gnostic cry / The microcosm abides in ME; Eternal Allah's nought but I."[127] And who is the "God-drunk Gnostic," as Burton calls the original mouthpiece of this Sufi doctrine? Al-Hallaj, of course, whom we have already encountered when discussing Crowley's interpretation of the *shahāda* and in the OTO rituals. Burton expresses similar ideas elsewhere in the poem: "Man worships self; his God is Man; the struggling of the mortal mind / To form its model as 'twould be, the perfect of itself to find."[128] It is hard not to see an echo of these verses in Crowley's "There is no God but Man," associated by him—as will be remembered—with the "secret tenets" of Islam.

There can be no doubt that Burton's image of a Sufi worldview, as presented in *The Kasīdah*, influenced Crowley's own understanding of Sufism. It also comes as no surprise that some critics have perceived a Nietzschean flavor in Burton's poem, which is of course slightly anachronistic.[129] This indicates that Crowley's perception of Islam and Sufism could have been influenced just as much by Nietzsche himself as by ideas that had been circulating in European culture for a while even before Nietzsche.

Echoes of Burton's vision can be found in various places in Crowley's works, as I hope will be clear by now. Crowley's *Scented Garden* offers

relatively little that can be added to this picture. The main point that Crowley seems to make with the book, if we avoid considering it a purely pornographic joke, is that a valid mystical or esoteric doctrine can be couched under the veil of what most would consider as inappropriate sexual metaphors, and, more prosaically, that sodomy is a perfectly acceptable sexual practice. The book *is* most certainly a wild pornographic joke, but it is *also* a fascinating exposition of sexual mysticism in Sufi garb. A section of the introduction, attributed to the equally pseudonymous editor of the book, Alain Lutiy, but obviously written by Crowley as well, focuses on Sufi doctrines. It does not say anything specific about Sufism, however. It rather claims that "there is one mysticism and not two," meaning that the truth obtained through mystical experiences is always the same everywhere and at all times.[130] Characteristically for Crowley, a naturalistic explanation is given for this fact, not a perennialist one. The truths of mysticism are the same in all human cultures "because the actual phenomena which every man is bound to observe in Nature are essentially the same in every clime," and "the physiological constitution of mankind is practically identical the wide world over."[131]

It is also interesting to see that, in other works, Crowley describes the doctrines of Sufism as being based on "pantheism":

> In its doctrine [i.e., of Islam] there is some slight taint, but much less than in Christianity. It is a virile religion. It looks facts in the face, and admits their horror; but it proposes to overcome them by sheer dint of manhood. Unfortunately, the metaphysical conceptions of its quasi-profane schools are grossly materialistic. It is only the Pantheism of the Sufis which eliminates the conception of propitiation.[132]

The problem of "propitiation" is of course the problem of theism: in other words, the belief in the existence of a transcendent, personal God who can be propitiated by human beings, an idea that Crowley, as we have seen, strongly rejects. But Sufism, being based on a pantheistic doctrine, has a more correct view of reality, because it rejects the idea of a personal God. For the rest, we can find in the quotation some of the other tropes we have already discussed. Interestingly enough, the idea that pantheism is at the core of Sufism can also be found in Burton's *Kasīdah*.[133]

If we put together all the elements we have seen so far in Crowley's works, we have a picture of the Sufis as being closely related to ideas and practices that have long been considered as extremely subversive by the

religious establishment and mainstream culture of the West, such as freethought, pantheism, and sodomy. But this is not a peculiar invention of Crowley, nor even of Burton, since it has its distant roots in older perceptions of Sufism by Western intellectuals.[134]

Conclusion

We have observed Crowley's positive appreciation of Islam, made evident not only by possible influences and similarities, which can always have an ambivalent meaning, but also by explicit passages in his writings. In the latter part of this chapter, I have tried to contextualize Crowley's Islamophilia by focusing especially on Burton's influence on him. Also, we have seen that Crowley's perception of Sufism, associated to freethought, homoerotic mysticism, and pantheism, whether or not it has its actual roots in real, historical Sufism, also depends on perceptions and interpretations that have been present in European culture at least since the Enlightenment.

It should hopefully be easier now to understand why Islam could exert such a power of fascination on Crowley. While the influence of Islam on Crowley's work, particularly with respect to Thelema, is evident enough, we can also see the kind of function it takes on. It becomes one of the means for expressing a desire for subversion and revolt against Victorian society, and more particularly against the form of Christianity that Crowley had experienced in the early part of his life. What is interesting to note is that this aspect brings Crowley unexpectedly close to another modern esotericist who would normally be thought to be his exact opposite: René Guénon (1886–1951).[135] It is easy to see how Guénon's radical choice of converting to Islam, moving to an Islamic country (Egypt), and living the "simple life" of a pious Muslim until the end of his life was a strongly subversive gesture toward modernity, Christianity, and the West as a whole.[136] The reasons, the contexts, the rhetoric, perhaps even the degree, of their respective Islamophilia were of course very different, but the function that Islam played in their lives is in the end quite similar. We can see something crucial here about the role of Islam in the history of Western esotericism that needs to be further investigated.

The history of Islamophilia and of the influence of Islam on Western esotericism remains largely to be written. This task in fact overlaps only partially with the history of Western Sufism, as it has been defined and brilliantly studied by Mark Sedgwick in his ground-breaking work on the

subject.[137] Even Angel Millar's recent study, *The Crescent and the Compass*, while not focusing exclusively on Sufism, remains inevitably limited in scope and only offers an analysis of a few cases from the long history of Islamophilia in Western esotericism.[138] It is to be hoped that a broader overview, or at least a much larger number of case studies, will be made available by future research. This will allow us to have a more nuanced, diverse picture of Western esotericism's "Orientalisms," and thus balance out the strong emphasis that previous research has given to the influence of traditions from South Asia and the Far East. This chapter has been one step in this direction.

Notes

1. There is an interest in the subject in some contemporary practitioners of Crowley's magical and religious system. Their collections of sources and analyses are in some cases very useful for the academic researcher, even when they show a clear religionist bent. The most interesting example is the series of texts published online in 2007 by T Polyphilus and collected under the title "Islamic Roots of Thelema" (see https://paradoxosalpha.livejournal.com/79983.html for the first instalment in the series, accessed 17 April 2020). The series was later the basis for an essay: "The Sharia of the Great Beast", published in: *Notocon VIII: Neither East nor West. Proceedings of the Ninth Biennial National Ordo Templi Orientis Conference* (Riverside, CA: United States Grand Lodge Ordo Templi Orientis, 2015), 2-20. "T Polyphilus" is the pseudonym of Dionysius Rogers, also known by the pseudonyms "Dionysos Thriambos" and "Paradoxos Alpha." He is a prominent member of the Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO), the occultist organization of which Crowley was the international leader for a number of years and to which I will return later.
2. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).
3. See particularly Bryan S. Turner, *Orientalism. Postmodernism and Globalism* (London: Routledge, 1994); Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and "The Mystic East"* (London: Routledge, 1999); Isolde Kurz, *Vom Umgang mit dem Anderen: Die Orientalismus-Debatte zwischen Alteritätdiskurs und interkultureller Kommunikation* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2000); Alexander L. Macfie, *Orientalism: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000); Daniel Martin Varisco, *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid* (Seattle: Washington University Press, 2007); Robert Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and Their Enemies* (London: Penguin Books,

2007); and Wael Hallaq, *Restating Orientalism*: *A Critique of Modern Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

4. Dane Kennedy, "' Captain Burton's Oriental Muck Heap': The Book of the Thousand Nights and the Uses of Orientalism," *Journal of British Studies* 39, no. 3 (July 2000): 319.
5. The *Book of the Law*, also known as *Liber AL vel Legis*, was first published by Crowley in 1909 (in: Id., *ΘΕΛΗΜΑ*, vol 3, [London], privately printed, [1909]), and has then been reprinted many times in various editions. I am using here the version published in Aleister Crowley, *The Equinox of the Gods* (London: Issued by the O.T.O., 1936). The text can also be found online, for example, here: http://lib.oto-usa.org/libri/liber0220.html, accessed April 26, 2020. As it is customary, references to the text will be given by indicating the corresponding chapter and verse.
6. On this important episode in Crowley's life, see in particular Alex Owen, "Aleister Crowley in the Desert," in: Alex Owen, ed., *The Place of Enchantment*: *British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 186–220. On the role of the Enochian system in Crowley's work, see Marco Pasi and Philippe Rabaté, "Langue angélique, langue magique: l'énochien," *Politica Hermetica* 13, (1999): 94–123; and Egil Asprem, *Arguing with Angels*: *Enochian Magic and Modern Occulture* (Albany: SUNY Press 2012), 85–102.
7. On Crowley's relationship with Christianity and Victorian culture, see Marco Pasi, "L'anticristianesimo in Aleister Crowley (1875–1947)," in *Aleister Crowley. Un mago a Cefal ù*, ed. PierLuigi Zoccatelli (Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1998), 41–67. For the more political aspects of this intellectual critique, see Marco Pasi, *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 23–64.
8. The main sources for Crowley's own narrative of the events are his autobiography, *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley*: *An Autohagiography* (London: Arkana, 1989), 382–402; and *The Equinox of the Gods* (London: O.T.O., 1936).
9. Caroline Tully, "Walk Like an Egyptian: Egypt as Authority in Aleister Crowley's Reception of The Book of the Law," *The Pomegranate* 12, no. 2 (2010): 20–47.
10. The textual corpus of the Golden Dawn, including the rituals and teaching material, has been published by various authors at different moments and in various versions. To this day, the single most comprehensive collection remains the one edited by Israel Regardie in the 1930s: Israel Regardie (ed.), *The Golden Dawn. An Account of the Teachings, Rites and Ceremonies of the Order of the Golden Dawn*, 4 volumes (Chicago: Aries Press, 1937–1940), then reprinted several times. Regardie later reorganized the material and republished it in a different edition: Israel Regardie

(ed.), *The Complete Golden Dawn System of Magic* (Phoenix: Falcon Press, 1984).

11. Concerning the early history and main textual aspects of the Quran, my main source is Alford T. Welch, Rudi Paret, and James D. Pearson, "al-Ḳurʾān," in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. Peri J. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill) first published online: 2012, 10.1163/1573–3912_islam_COM_0543, accessed April 21, 2020.
12. For the Quran see, for example, XV:9; for the *Book of the Law*, see I:36; I:54; and II:54.
13. The notion of the Holy Guardian Angel was derived by Crowley from *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abra-Melin the Mage, As Delivered by Abraham the Jew unto his Son Lamech, A.D. 1458* (London: J. M. Watkins, 1898). This was an important magical text that had been published by Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, one of the leaders of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, around the same time as Crowley became a member of the Order. The book had a profound impact on Crowley. On the complex issue of Crowley's gradual identification of Aiwass as his own Holy Guardian Angel, see Marco Pasi, "Varieties of Magical Experience: Aleister Crowley's Views on Occult Practice," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 6, no. 2 (December 2011): 158–160.
14. Aleister Crowley, "Liber Resh vel Helios. Sub Figurâ CC," *The Equinox* I, no. 6 (September 1911): 29–32.
15. On this point, see also the comments of two contemporary Thelemite practitioners, both prominent members of the OTO and of the Gnostic Catholic Church: Tau Apiryon (David Scriven), "The Kiblah," in: Tau Apiryon and Helena (Lynn Scriven), *Mystery of Mystery. A Primer of Thelemic Ecclesiastical Gnosticism* (*Red Flame*, 2) (Berkeley: Red Flame, 2001), 83–88, now available online at https://sabazius.oto-usa.org/the-kiblah/, accessed 19 April 2020; and T Polyphilus (Dionysius Rogers), "The Islam of To Mega Therion: Second Pillar," https://paradoxosalpha.livejournal.com/82993.html, accessed April 19, 2020.
16. Boleskine, with its villa and the surrounding estate, is located on the southern shore of Loch Ness. Crowley bought it in 1899 and spent long periods there until around 1914. It was there that Crowley attempted to perform the rituals described in the *Book of Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage*, which he believed to be of great importance in his initiatory path (see also n. 14 above). The house was almost completely destroyed by two consecutive fires in December 2015 and July 2019. The estate has now been acquired by the Boleskine House Foundation, which has been created in 2019 with the purpose of restoring it and preserving its cultural heritage. See https://www.boleskinehouse.org/, accessed April 19, 2020.

17. Aleister Crowley, *Magick Without Tears* (St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1973), 168.
18. Aleister Crowley, "Liber V vel Reguli," in *Magick in Theory and Practice* (Paris: Published for subscribers only—Lecram Press, 1929 [1930]), 331–344.
19. A history of the modern neo-Gnostic movement, of which Crowley's Gnostic Catholic Church is a part, remains largely to be written. The best overviews, if a bit dated now, are Massimo Introvigne, *Il ritorno dello gnosticismo* (Carnago: SugarCo, 1993); and Ladislaus Toth, "Gnostic Church," in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff et al., (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 400–403. See also Hugh B. Urban, "The Knowing of Knowing. Neo-Gnosticism, from the O.T.O. to Scientology," *Gnosis: Journal of Gnostic Studies*, 4 (2019): 99–116.
20. O.T.O. (Aleister Crowley), "Liber XV. Ecclesiae Gnosticae Catholicae Canon Missae," *The Equinox* III, no. 1 (March 1919): 247–270. See 249 for the instruction on the altar.
21. Richard Kaczynski, *Perdurabo. The Life of Aleister Crowley* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2010), 319.
22. Aleister Crowley, "Liber CCC. Khabs am Pekht," *The Equinox* III, no.1 (March 1919): 178. For an even more elaborate interpretation of the verse from the perspective of a contemporary Thelemite, in which the "Kaaba" is not mainly understood as a geographical place, but as the body of each individual practitioner, see Jerry Edward Cornelius, "On the Proper Use of the Clerk House," online at http://www.cornelius93.com/aa-clerk-houses-2016.html, accessed April 19, 2020.
23. However, it is interesting to note that in Islamic Sufism metaphorical interpretations of the Kaaba have also emerged from time to time, although they were usually treated as heterodox and condemned by religious authorities. We have perhaps the most famous example of this with the Persian Sufi al-Hallaj, who claimed that the pilgrims' circumambulation of the Kaaba at Mecca could be performed just as effectively, if symbolically, "around a table at home" or "round the Kaʿba of your heart." It is mainly for this claim that he was eventually executed. See Louis Massignon and Louis Gardet, "al-Ḥallāǧ," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*; 10.1163/1573–3912_islam_COM_0256, accessed April 21, 2020; and Nile Green, *Sufism: A Global History* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 41. As we will see, Crowley was familiar with al-Hallaj's story.
24. For an introduction to these aspects of Thelema, cf. Marco Pasi, "Aleister Crowley," in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 281–287. For a more extensive analysis, see Ian Drummond, "The Occult Macrohistory of Aleister

Crowley" (Honors Diss., University of Sydney, 2003), available online at https://www.academia.edu/3991438/The_occult_macrohistory_of_Aleister_Crowley, accessed May 1, 2020. See also, especially on the eschatological aspects, Henrik Bogdan, "Envisioning the Birth of a New Aeon: Dispensationalism and Millenarianism in the Thelemic Tradition," in Henrik Bogdan and Martin P. Starr (eds.), *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 89–106. About Corbin's notion of hierohistory (*hiérohistoire*) see Jean-Louis Vieillard-Baron, "Temps spirituel et hiéro-histoire selon Henry Corbin: une phénoménologie de la conscience psycho-cosmique," in: *Henry Corbin et le comparatisme spirituel. Colloque tenu à Paris les 5 et 6 juin 1999* (Milan: Archë, 2000), 25–37.

25. Bogdan, "Envisioning the Birth," 90.
26. The doctrine of the "Magi" is presented by Crowley in several texts, with some significant developments over time. Of particular importance is the description given in his *Liber Aleph Vel CXI. The Book of Wisdom or Folly, in the Form of an Epistle of 666. The Great Wild Beast to his Son 777* (West Point: Thelema Publishing Company, 1961), 68–75, and *The Confessions*, 795–796. See also Drummond, "The Occult Macrohistory," n.p.n. (but 11–15). To the sources discussed by Drummond one should add: Aleister Crowley, "Liber B vel Magi. Su figurâ I," *The Equinox* I, no. 7 (March 1912): 5–9. With respect to Schuré, the reference is obviously to Édouard Schuré, *Les Grands initiés. Esquisse de l'histoire secrëte des religions* (Paris: Perrin, 1889)—English transl.: *The Great Initiates. Sketch of the Secret History of Religions* (London: William Rider & Son, 1912). About the concept of Prisca Theologia in the long history of Western esotericism, see Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 7–12, and *passim*.
27. Arent Jan Wensinck, "Rasūl," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 10.1163/1573–3912_islam_COM_0911, accessed April 21, 2020; Toufic Fahd, "Nubuwwa," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 10.1163/1573–3912_islam_SIM_5964, accessed April 21, 2020; Marilyn Robinson Waldman and Bruce B. Lawrence, "Nubūwah," in Lindsay Jones (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., (Farmington Hills: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), vol. 10, 6733–6739.
28. We will see later what role has the idea of God in Crowley's perception of Islam.
29. Aleister Crowley, *The Heart of the Master and Other Papers* (New York: Ordo Templi Orientis and New Falcon Publications, 1992), 13–17 and 102. With respect to terminology, the idea of the Great White Brotherhood is ostensibly derived by Crowley from Theosophical literature, while that

of the Secret Chiefs played an important role in the teachings of the Golden Dawn. The two concepts overlap with each other in Crowley.

30. Bogdan, "Envisioning the Birth," 90.
31. The structure of the A.·.A.·.is described by Crowley in his "One Star in Sight," in Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice*, 229–244.
32. Crowley, "One Star in Sight," 234.
33. See Ian Richard Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists. An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 36.
34. Crowley, *Liber Aleph*, 68–75. Jesus was included in an earlier list of Magi in "The Vision and the Voice," the account of Crowley's visionary experiences in the Algerian Sahara in 1909, but the name was later taken out. See Aleister Crowley, "The Vision and the Voice," *The Equinox* I, no. 5 (March 1911): 126; and Drummond, "The Occult Macrohistory," n.p.n. (but 12–13). This is not so surprising, as Crowley came to doubt the actual historical existence of Jesus, or, more precisely, believed that "Jesus" was the syncretic aggregation of several historical persons and divinities, having merged into a single mythical figure. Features and episodes were attributed to Jesus based on the model of the "dying god" as described by James Frazer in his famous *Golden Bough*. See Crowley, *The Confessions*, 237, 795, and 808–809. Crowley expands on these ideas, and more generally on his interpretation of the Gospels, in his *The Gospel according to St. Bernard Shaw*, published posthumously in a first limited edition in 1953 (Barstow: Thelema Publishing Company, 1953), and then as *Crowley on Christ*, ed. Francis King (London: The C.W. Daniel Company, 1974). About Crowley's attitudes toward Christianity, see Pasi, "L'anticristianesimo." All the "Magi" listed by Crowley are considered by him also as "Saints" of his Gnostic Catholic Church.
35. Crowley, *Liber Aleph*, 75.
36. Crowley, *Liber Aleph*, 68.
37. Crowley, *Liber Aleph*, 74. "ALLH" is obviously an alternative transliteration of "Allāh," the Arabic word for "God."
38. Crowley, *Liber Aleph*, 74.
39. Crowley, *Liber Aleph*, 74.
40. Crowley, *Liber Aleph*, 74.
41. Crowley, *Liber Aleph*, 74.
42. Incidentally, it should be noted that the first part of the *shahāda* ("no god") is actually *lā ʾilāha*, where the word for "god" is with one "l," not with two as in "la allh."
43. The "Liber Oz" is a one-page pamphlet that was printed and distributed by Crowley during the Second World War: Aleister Crowley, *Liber LXXVII. Oz* (Rainbow Valley: OTO, 1941). Interestingly enough, the

text was probably written by Crowley around 1918/1919 (the same period in which he was writing the *Liber Aleph*) and included in the revised ritual for the II degree of the OTO, to which we will return. See Theodor Reuss and Aleister Crowley, *O.T.O. Rituals and Sex Magick* (Thame: I-H-O Books, 1999), 202. As we will see, the setting of the ritual is in the Egyptian desert, where the Sultan Saladin has set his camp. By implication, one would have to assume that the core political and social values of Thelema are perfectly consonant to an Islamic context, as opposed to a Christian one.

44. Aleister Crowley, "Liber Legis. The Comment," *The Equinox* I no.7 (March 1912): 400.
45. On Crowley and Nietzsche, see Pasi, "L'anticristianesimo," 62–64.
46. Muhammad Iqbal, *Javid-Nama* (London: Routledge, 2011).
47. Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing: A Study into the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal* (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 89–90.
48. Iqbal, *Javid-Nama*, 112, vv. 2738–2739.
49. Iqbal, *Javid-Nama*, 113, vv. 2743–2744.
50. Iqbal, *Javid-Nama*, 112, vv. 2708–2709, and 2719. See also Suleyman Bachir Diagne, *Comment philosopher en Islam?* (Paris: Philippe Rey—Jimsaan, 2014), 135; and Massimo Campanini, *I giorni di Dio. Il viaggio e il tempo tra Occidente e Islam* (Milan: Mimesis, 2019), 138–142.
51. III: 52.
52. Aleister Crowley, *The Law Is For All, An Extended Commentary on the Book of the Law*, ed. Israel Regardie (Phoenix: New Falcon Publications, 1993), 301–302.
53. See Jan Assmann, *Religio Duplex: How the Enlightenment Reinvented Egyptian Religion* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2014).
54. Mark Sedgwick, *Western Sufism. From the Abbasids to the New Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 98–101. See also John V. Tolan, *Faces of Muhammad. Western Perceptions of the Prophet of Islam from the Middle Ages to Today* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 150–154; and Humberto Garcia, *Islam and the English Enlightenment, 1670–1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 51–58.
55. For an overview of the history of the OTO, see Marco Pasi, "Ordo Templi Orientis," in: Wouter J. Hanegraaff et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 898–906. For a more comprehensive study, focusing especially on the origins and early period, see Richard Kaczynski, *Forgotten Templars: The Untold Origins of Ordo Templi Orientis* (n.p., Printed for the author, 2012). Also useful, if often chaotic and biased in its treatment, is the vast amount of material on the history of the OTO published by Peter-R. König, whose most recent systematization can be found in *Der O.T.O. Phänomen*

Reload, 3 vv. (Munich: Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Religions- und Weltanschauungsfragen, 2011).

56. See Kaczynski, *Forgotten Templars*, 271–276.
57. Kaczynski, *Forgotten Templars*, 119–172. On the history of the Egyptian rites, see Gérard Galtier, *Maçonnerie Égyptienne Rose Croix et Néo-Chevalerie. Les Fils de Cagliostro* (Monaco: Éditions du Rocher, 1989); and Serge Caillet, *La franc-maçonnerie égyptienne de Memphis-Misraïm* (Paris: Dervy, 2003).
58. Kaczynski, *Forgotten Templars*, 271–272. See also Richard Kaczynski, "Continuing Knowledge from Generation unto Generation: The Social and Literary Background of Aleister Crowley's Magick," in *Aleister Crowley*, ed. Bogdan and Starr, 148–150.
59. Crowley, *The Confessions*, 656.
60. Crowley, *The Confessions*, 656.
61. Kaczynski, "Continuing Knowledge,"152–156.
62. For the text of the rituals, see Reuss and Crowley, *O.T.O. Rituals*; and Francis King, ed., *The Secret Rituals of the O.T.O.* (London: The C.W. Daniel Company, 1973). See also above, n. 44.
63. On the neo-Templar tradition in Freemasonry and occultism, see René Le Forestier, *La Franc-Maçonnerie templiëre et occultiste aux XVIIIe et XIXe siëcles*, 2 vv. (Paris: La Table d'Émeraude 1987); Peter Partner, *The Murdered Magicians: The Templars and their Myth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 87–180; and Pierre Mollier, "Neo-Templar Traditions," in Wouter J. Hanegraaff et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 849–853.
64. Partner, *The Murdered Magicians*, 34–35, 68, and 77–78.
65. Partner, *The Murdered Magicians*. See also Zrinka Stahuljak, *Pornographic Archaeology. Medicine, Medievalism, and the Invention of the French Nation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 71–80.
66. Aleister Crowley, "The Scorpion," *The Equinox* I, no. 6 (September 1911): 67–107. See also Crowley, *The Confessions*, 656.
67. Crowley, "The Scorpion," 107.
68. See also above n. 44. On the Hiramic legend, see Henrik Bogdan, "Freemasonry and Western Esotericism," in *Handbook of Freemasonry*, ed. Henrik Bogdan and Jan A.M. Snoek (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 296–301; and Jan A.M. Snoek, "The Evolution of the Hiramic Legend in England and France," *Heredom* 11 (2003): 11–53. Interestingly enough, the influential twentieth-century Sufi Idries Shah (1924–1996) also mentions an analogy between al-Hallaj and Hiram Abif, while discussing possible historical connections between Sufis, Templars, and Freemasons. See Idries Shah, *The Sufis* (London: The Octagon Press, 1999), 399. Shah may have been familiar with Crowley's OTO rituals through his acquain-

tance with Gerald Gardner (1884–1964), the founder of Wicca (see Sedgwick, *Western Sufism*, 210). Gardner had met Crowley and had joined the OTO in the 1940s.

69. See Patrick D. Bowen, "Abdullah Quilliam and the Rise of International Esoteric-Masonic Islamophilia," in Jamie Gilham and Ron Geaves (eds), *Victorian Muslim. Abdullah Quilliam and Islam in the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 25–39. See also Patrick D. Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islamin the United States, Volume 1. White American Muslims before 1975* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 115–138.
70. Bowen, "Abdullah Quilliam and the Rise," 27. See also Angel Millar, *The Crescent and the Compass: Islam, Freemasonry, Esotericism, and Revolution in the Modern Age* (n.p.: Numen Books, 2015), 65–76. Sedgwick, in his *Western Sufism*, does not mention Quilliam at all, which seems to confirm his irrelevance for the history of Sufism in the West.
71. Bowen, "Abdullah Quilliam and the Rise," 36–37. See also Crowley's account of the events in [Aleister Crowley], "In memoriam—John Yarker," *The Equinox* I, no. 10 (September 1913): xix–xxix.
72. Bowen, "Abdullah Quilliam and the Rise," 36.
73. For an overview of OTO's history after Crowley, see Marco Pasi, "Ordo Templi Orientis," in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff et al., 905–906. On Crowley's letters to McMurtry concerning the Caliphate, see "The Grady McMurtry Project," https://blazingstar-oto.org/gradymcmurtry/letters/aleister-crowley-mcmurtry-correspondence/, accessed December 4, 2020. See also J. Edward Cornelius, "Letter Files," http://www.cornelius93.com/Grady-LetterFiles-MainPage.html, accessed May 28, 2020.
74. Some scholars have given attention to Crowley's interest in Burton's works and fascination for his persona. Some have done it while having Burton as the focus of their research, such as Colette Colligan; some others while focusing on Crowley, such as Alex Owen, Richard Kaczynski, and Massimo Introvigne. See Colligan, "' A Race of Born Pederasts:' Sir Richard Burton, Homosexuality, and the Arabs," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*. 25, no. 1 (2003): 11–13; Ead., *The Traffic in Obscenity from Byron to Beardsley: Sexuality and Exoticism in Nineteenth-Century Print Culture* (Basingstoke: Springer, 2006): 85–86; Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*,189–190, and 203–206; Kaczynski, "Continuing Knowledge," 152–156; and Introvigne, "The Beast and the Prophet. Aleister Crowley's Fascination with Joseph Smith," in Bogdan and Starr (eds.), *Aleister Crowley*, 267–268.
75. Richard F. Burton, (ed.), *The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana* (Benares: Kama Shastra Society, 1883); Richard F. Burton, ed., *The Book of Thousand*

Nights and a Night (Benares: Printed by the Burton Club for Private Subscribers Only, 1885–1888, 16 vol).

76. The critical bibliography on Burton, which includes at least a dozen biographies, is now very extensive. For my purpose here, I have particularly taken into account Dane Kennedy's important study, *The Highly Civilized Man: Richard Burton and the Victorian World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); and Jean-François Gournay, "L'appel du Proche Orient. Richard Francis Burton et son temps 1821–1890" (PhD diss., Université de Paris IV, Lille, 1983). Both interpret Burton against the broad cultural and social context of his time.
77. Just a couple of quotations from Crowley's autobiography: "Burton was always my hero," and "I went toward China … I was (after all) treading, though reverently and afar off, in the footsteps of my boyhood's hero, Richard Francis Burton" (Crowley, *The Confessions*, 327 and 460). Under the pseudonym "Reverend P.D. Carey" Crowley wrote an essay on Burton, in which he expressed all his admiration for him. The text was apparently never published during Crowley's lifetime and appeared for the first time in 2014: see Reverend P.D. Carey (Aleister Crowley), "Sir Richard Francis Burton," in *Mystery of Mystery: A Primer of Thelemic Ecclesiastical Gnosticism* (Maple Grove: Ordo Templi Orientis USA, 2014), 252–258. The text is not dated, but was probably written in the period of the First World War, which Crowley spent in the United States. It is no coincidence that Reverend Carey is also one of the pseudonyms used by Crowley in his pornographic book *The Scented Garden of Abdullah the Satirist of Shiraz* (1910), strongly inspired by Burton and to which I will return.
78. On Eckenstein, see Thomas S. Blakeney and D. F. O. Dangar, "Oscar Eckenstein, 1859–1921," *The Alpine Journal*, 65 no. 300 (May 1960): 62–79; and John Gill, *The Origins of Bouldering: An Informal Survey of Sport from the Late 1800s to the 1960s and Beyond* (n.p.: J. Gill-Blurb, 2008), 9–28. Another indirect, but significant, connection between Crowley and Burton should be mentioned: Leonard Smithers, the publisher with whom Burton collaborated for his translations of a series of Latin erotic texts, the so-called *Priapeia*. Smithers later became the main publisher of the British Decadent movement and a close associate of figures such as Aubrey Beardsley and Arthur Symons. It is not surprising that Crowley, also close to the Decadent movement in his student years at Cambridge, turned to Smithers in order to have some of his poetical works published. See D. Kennedy, "Oriental Muck Heap," 321; and James G. Nelson, *Publisher to the Decadents: Leonard Smithers in the Careers of Beardsley, Wilde, and Dowson* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), *passim*.

79. This is the Sir William Martin Conway's Karakoram expedition of 1892. See Blakeney and Dangar, "Oscar Eckenstein, 1859–1921," 64–65.
80. See Nancy Charley, "Oscar Eckenstein and Richard Burton," 29 July 2016. Text available online from the SAR website: http://royalasiaticsociety.org/oscar-eckenstein-and-richard-burton, accessed October 3, 2016.
81. In the dedication, Burton is defined as "the perfect pioneer of spiritual and physical adventures" (Crowley, *The Confessions*, 27). Apart from Burton, Eckenstein, and Bennett, grouped together and referred to as "Three Immortal Memories," the dedication also includes "Three Friends": the mathematician J.W.N. Sullivan, the painter Augustus John, and the publisher P.R. Stephensen. Of these six, Burton is the only one Crowley never met personally. Also noteworthy is a passage in the *Confessions* where Crowley says that, when he left Cambridge University in 1898, "Sir Richard Burton was my hero and Eckenstein his modern representative" (ibid., 166).
82. See O.T.O. (Aleister Crowley), "Liber XV," 261.
83. I draw attention to this aspect of Crowley's work and personality in Pasi, *Aleister Crowley*, 24–25.
84. For Burton as a "cultural crossdresser," see Colette Colligan, "' Esoteric Pornography': Sir Richard Burton's Arabian Nights and the Origins of Pornography," *Victorian Review* 28, no. 2 (2002): 53. In Crowley's *Confessions* we find other anecdotes of cultural crossdressing with explicit reference to Burton, and also in relation to other religious contexts, such as Hinduism. See for instance the famous episode in which Crowley sat with only "a loincloth and a begging bowl" close to the famous temples of Madurai, in South India, in order to have access to their inner parts, normally forbidden to Europeans. He was eventually "allowed to enter some of the secret shrines," where he sacrificed a goat to the goddess Bhavani (*The Confessions*, 254–255).
85. Crowley, *The Confessions*, 388.
86. Richard F. Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah* (London: Tylston and Edwards, 1893), 5–6. See also Kennedy, *The Highly Civilized Man*, 70–72.
87. Edward Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London: C. Knight and Co., 1836). Lane is also the author, like Burton, of an English translation of the Arabian Nights.
88. Another famous example of a "cultural crossdresser" in an Arab context, this time contemporary to Crowley, is that of T.E. Lawrence. This example is also mentioned by Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 204.
89. See Said, *Orientalism*, 160–161.

90. Crowley, *The Confessions*, 387. The *talwar* is a curved sword typical of the Indian Subcontinent.
91. Crowley, *The Confessions*, 388.
92. Crowley, *The Confessions*, 625–626. Significantly, Crowley mentions Burton a few lines before as an inspiration for his behavior on this occasion.
93. Richard F. Burton (ed.), *The Perfumed Garden of the Sheikh Nefzaoui. A Manual of Arabian Erotology* (*XVI. Century*) (Benares: Kama Shastra Society, 1886); Burton, *The Kama Sutra*.
94. See Hugh B. Urban, *Magia Sexualis*: *Sex, Magic, and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).
95. On this point, see also Marco Pasi, "But What Does Esotericism Have To Do With Sex?," in *Hermes Explains*: *Thirty Questions about Western Esotericism,* ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Peter J. Forshaw, and Marco Pasi (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 207–215; Hendrik Bogdan, "Challenging the Morals of Western Society: The Use of Ritualized Sex in Contemporary Occultism," *The Pomegranate* 8, no. 2 (2006): 211–246; and Hugh B. Urban, "The Beast with Two Backs. Aleister Crowley, Sex Magic and the Exhaustion of Modernity," *Nova Religio. The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 7, no. 3 (2004): 7–25.
96. See John Patrick Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*: *A Nineteenth-Century Black American Spiritualist, Rosicrucian, and Sex Magician* (Albany: University of New York Press, 1996), in particular ch. X, "The Coming of the Nusa'iri."
97. Ari Adut, "A Theory of Scandal: Victorians, Homosexuality, and the Fall of Oscar Wilde," *American Journal of Sociology* 111, no. 1 (July 2005): 213–248.
98. See Colligan, "A Race of Born Pederasts," 85–86.
99. It should be noted that the distinction between the Arab world and Islam is not always clear or reflected in this context.
100. See Lawrence Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*: *A Life of Aleister Crowley* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 42–43, 128 and 183. See also Marco Pasi, "The Neverendingly Told Story: Recent Biographies of Aleister Crowley," *Aries. Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 3, no. 2 (2003): 233.
101. [Aleister Crowley], *The Scented Garden of Abdullah the Satirist of Shiraz. Translated from a rare Indian Ms. by the Late Major Lutiy* (London: Privately Printed, 1910). See the interesting analysis in Joseph Allen Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 279–286. Crowley usually refers to this book with the title *Bagh-i-Muattar*, which is the transliteration of the Persian inscription

appearing on the frontispiece. It has been reprinted in 1991 by Teitan Press (Chicago) with an introduction by Martin P. Starr.

102. [Burton], *The Perfumed Garden*.
103. It should be noted that this point, although quite obvious, has escaped some researchers, who have thought that Crowley's book is a real translation of an original Persian text. See for instance Colligan, "A Race of Born Pederasts," 11–12.
104. See Kennedy, *The Highly Civilized Man*, 71. Burton continued to use the name as a pseudonym also after his trip to Mecca, for instance when writing letters to friends. In 1875 he would also organize weekly smoking parties in London known as "Haji Abdullah's Divan" (*ibid*., 197). As we will see, Burton also uses a similar pseudonym, "Hājī Abdū El-Yezdi," in his poem *The Kasīdah* (1880).
105. See Dane Kennedy and Burke E. Casari, "Burnt Offerings: Isabel Burton and 'The Scented Garden' manuscript," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 2, no. 2 (1997): 229–244.
106. Richard F. Burton, "D. Pederasty," in *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* 10 (Benares: Printed by the Kama-Shastra Society for Private Subscribers Only, 1885), 205–254. Note that the term "homosexuality" at the time had not gained wide currency yet, and that "pederasty" was a much more common term.
107. See Stephen O. Murray, "Some Nineteenth-Century Reports of Islamic Homosexualities," in *Islamic Homosexualities. Culture, History, and Literature*, ed. Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 211–217.
108. Crowley, *The Confessions*, 451–452. See also Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism*, 283; and Millar, *The Crescent and the Compass*, 45–47.
109. See Mandakini Dubey, "Esotericism and Orientalism: Nineteenth-Century Narrative Initiations" (PhD Diss. Duke University, 2003), 127–140. See 131 for the idea of a "sodomystical language" of Persian Sufi poetry that Western readers struggled to interpret and come to terms to.
110. Kennedy, *The Highly Civilized Man*, 206–208.
111. Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters. Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 83–96.
112. Jeng-Guo S. Chen, "Gendering India: Effeminacy and the Scottish Enlightenment's Debates over Virtue and Luxury," *The Eighteenth Century* 51, no. 1–2 (Spring-Summer 2010): 193–201.
113. Crowley, *The Confessions*, 540.
114. Richard F. Burton, "Notes on Waitz's Anthropology," *The Anthropological Review* 2, no. 7 (November 1864): 248. See also Kennedy, *The Highly Civilized Man*, 80.
115. Crowley, *The Confessions*, 388.

116. On the Aissawa, see Mehdi Nabti, *Les Aïssawa: Soufisme, musique et rituels de transe au Maroc* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2011).
117. Crowley, *The Confessions*, 550–552.
118. Crowley, *The Confessions*, 552.
119. Crowley, *The Confessions*, 445.
120. Crowley, *The Confessions*, 451.
121. Richard F. Burton, *The Kasīdah* (*couplets*) *of Hājī Abdū Al-Yazdi. A Lay of the Higher Law. Translated and Annotated by His Friend and Pupil, F. B.* (London: H.J. Cook, 1900 or. ed.: 1880).
122. On Burton's use of the trope of the "pseudo-translator" of a literary work (while being the actual author), and with observations that could be easily applied also to Crowley's *Scented Garden*, see Glyn Pursglove, "Fakery, Serious Fun, and Cultural Change: Some Motives of the Pseudo-Translator," *Hermēneus. Revista de Traducción e Interpretación*, 13 (2011): 1–16. See also Dubey, "Esotericism and Orientalism," 109–113.
123. For Crowley's appreciation of *The Kasīdah* see Crowley, "Sir Richard Francis Burton." It should be noted that Crowley also recommends its reading to aspirants of his occult order, the A.·.A.·.. See the "Curriculum of the A.·.A.·." in: Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice*, 213.
124. See Sedgwick, *Western Sufism*, 121–125.
125. It should be noted that Burton claimed to have been initiated to Sufism and to have become a "Master-Sufi." About this claim and more generally about his interest in Islam and Sufism, see Mary S. Lovell *A Rage to Live. A Biography of Richard and Isabel Burton* (London: Abacus, 2004), 84–86; and Kennedy, *The Highly Civilized Man*, 80–83.
126. On the philosophical ideas expressed in *The Kasīdah*, see Kennedy, *The Highly Civilized Man*, 195–205; Dubey, "Esotericism and Orientalism," 98–127; and Gournay, "L'appel du Proche Orient," 407–447.
127. Burton, *The Kasīdah*, 3.
128. Burton, *The Kasīdah*, 8.
129. Kennedy, *The Highly Civilized Man*, 200.
130. Crowley, *The Scented Garden*, 13.
131. Crowley, *The Scented Garden*, 13.
132. Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, 81.
133. Burton, *The Kasīdah*, 18–19. This is also noted by Burton's wife, Isabel, in her preface to the 1900 edition: "It is a poem of extraordinary power, on the Nature and Destiny of Man, anti-Christian and Pantheistic" (Isabel Burton, "Preface," in *The Kasīdah*, ed. Burton, 4).
134. See Sedgwick, *Western Sufism*, for examples of the Sufis being perceived as freethinkers (p. 111), pantheists (p. 131), and sodomites (p. 131). Sedgwick does not mention either Crowley or Burton in the book. Their

ideas however clearly belong to the history of Western esoteric perceptions of Sufism.

135. On Crowley and Guénon (and more generally Guénonian traditionalism), see Pasi, *Aleister Crowley*, 129–136.
136. Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World. Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 74–80.
137. Sedgwick, *Western Sufism*.
138. Millar, *The Crescent and the Compass*.

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CHAPTER 9

The Sufi Shaykh and His Patients: Merging Islam, Psychoanalysis, and Western Esotericism

Francesco Piraino

Gabriele Mandel (1926–2010), an Italian with distant Afghan roots, was a charismatic *khalīfa* (local leader) and the founder of the first Jerrahi-Halveti *tekke* (Sufi lodge) in Milan. Mandel was a university professor, an artists, a psychoanalyst, a Freemason, and a Sufi, representing in one individual many elements of European Sufism, such as: the Islam of migrants, who transplanted their practices and social life in a new country;[1] Western esotericism;[2] the cultic milieu;[3] and academic research on mysticism and religions.[4]

Mandel was a complex and eclectic figure who attracted both spiritual seekers—on the paths of René Guénon (1886–1951), Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998), Georges Gurdjieff (1872–1949), and Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961)—and lifelong Muslims looking for a traditional Sufi shaykh. He was also a key figure at the Milan mosque in viale Padova, attended mostly by first-generation Muslim migrants. Mandel, with his charisma and erudition, strongly influenced the development of Italian Sufism and Islam as a whole. In fact, he played an important role in the Islamic

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cultural sphere, translating fundamental books (including the *Quran* and Rumi's poetry), and participating in multiple cultural events.

Mandel's approach to Sufi spirituality was quite unusual, merging psychoanalysis and Sufism, often calling the *dhikr* (ritual that consists in the repetition of God's names) "a collective session of therapy," and tracing Freudian, Jungian, and Adlerian theories with the history of Sufism. In this chapter, I will show how Mandel's Sufism was built on works by Idries Shah (1924–1996) and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (born 1933), and to a lesser extent on works by Orientalists such as Henry Corbin (1903–1978). I will also demonstrate that his intellectual and spiritual horizons were influenced by Judaism, Greek philosophy, and Western esotericism, which all contributed to the elaboration of a multicultural and multi-epistemological universalism. This universalism did not imply a process of de-Islamization, as in the case of the Sufi Order International founded by Inayat Khan (1882–1927),[5] nor did it correspond to the Traditionalist philosophy of Guénon, which was characterized by a profoundly anti-modern spirit. Mandel's understanding of sacred knowledge resonates with Transcendentalist philosophy and with psychological interpretation of William James (1842–1910),[6] focusing both on perennialism and on the universality of the religious bodily experience.

I will argue that Mandel's sacred knowledge is deeply rooted in European culture, but cannot be labeled as a "rejected knowledge" as per Wouter Hanegraaff,[7] because he considered that the fragments of this knowledge are also present in modern and mainstream sciences, such as psychology, psychoanalysis, and quantum physics. Nor could it be labeled as an "absolute knowledge" justifying spiritual and/or social elitism following Kocku von Stuckrad[8] and Hugh Urban;[9] in fact, Mandel professed a diffused and fragmented esoteric knowledge that could be grasped by diverse actors (religious and secular alike) in multiple social and cultural contexts.

I will show that, in common with many Western Sufi orders, Mandel's intellectual path and Sufi order in Milan went through a process of Islamization in the 1980s, thanks to the encounter with the Jerrahi-Halveti Sufi order, which led him to abandon certain Orientalist conceptions of Sufism. Despite this process of Islamization, Mandel maintained a peculiar relationship with Islamic orthodoxy. According to his disciples, he respected the main Islamic norms and rituals, but at the same time, he was quite liberal with regards to the religious practices of his children and disciples. One of his children became Muslim, the other did not.

This liberal approach, combined with some heterodox ideas about reincarnation, did not prevent Mandel and his disciples from developing good relations with the Jerrahi mother *tekke* in Istanbul, which represents a mainstream, orthodox form of Sufism. On the other hand, the liberal approach concerning Islamic norms and the multiplicity of religious languages and epistemologies favored a fragmented Sufi order, where different disciples lived distinct Sufism(s), according to their respectively intellectual and emotional framework. This fragmentation was confirmed by the near dissolution of the Italian Jerrahi-Halveti after Mandel's death in 2010.

I have reconstructed Mandel's intellectual and spiritual life through his publications, the research notes that I gathered in 2013–2014 during six months of ethnographic fieldwork, which included a visit to Istanbul, and six in-depth interviews with his former disciples.[10]

Gabriele Mandel's Biography

Sufi shaykhs' biographies and hagiographies are fundamental instruments in the analysis of every Sufi order; and this is particularly true for Gabriele Mandel, since reconstructing his path will help us in identifying his heterogenous intellectual and religious background.

Mandel was born in Bologna in 1924 to an Italian couple: a Jewish mother—Carlotta Rimini (1903–1992)—and a Muslim Freemason father—Yusuf Roberto Mandel (1895–1963). Even as Gabriele Mandel was raised as a Muslim, he deepened his Jewish heritage, studying Kabbalah and Jewish culture, and he even wrote a book on the Hebrew alphabet.[11] His father was an intellectual who wrote on several topics, including the history of the First World War, Sufism, and science fiction.[12] Roberto Mandel's close friendship with the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863–1938), cultivated during their political experience in the Fascist and Masonic milieu, led him to name his son Gabriele.[13]

Italian racial laws in 1938, and the alliance of Mussolini with Hitler, pushed Roberto Mandel outside the Fascist party. Roberto and Gabriele Mandel were imprisoned in 1944 at San Vittore, Roberto for protecting and hiding his wife in a secret place in Milan, and Gabriele for being a Jew. Thanks to a fake medical emergency the Mandels managed to escape. This story was told in a book written by Roberto Mandel, *San Vittore*: *inferno nazista* (San Vittore: the Nazi Hell).[14] Finally, Mandel participated in the Italian resistance movement in an anarchist brigade.

Every article written by Gabriele Mandel or by his disciples stresses his Afghan origins. On the other hand, this heritage is more imagined than historically proved, there being four generations of distance that separate Gabriele from his allegedly Afghan ancestors. According to Paola Mandel (Gabriele's daughter), Mandel's great-great grandfather moved from Afghanistan to Hungary, where at some point he converted to Christianity for practical reasons; later the older son converted to Islam and moved to Italy.[15] Despite this historical distance, Gabriele had a significant relationship with the Sufi shaykh Keki Efendi Khan-i Hetimandel Rūd, called the "Afghan uncle," who allegedly initiated him to the Naqshbandi Sufi order in 1938 at the age of 14 in Afghanistan. Finally, it has to be stressed that Mandel's surname has a Jewish origin, but I never heard any narratives about his possible Jewish origins on his father's side. Mandel stressed that his family name was originally Hetimandel Rūd, connected to Afghan toponyms, and along the centuries was shortened and became Mandel.

Before the Second World War, Mandel graduated as a violin player from the Canneti conservatory in Vincenza, and after the war in classical literature and Fine Arts from Paris, later in psychology from Milan University and medicine from Pavia University. He taught History of Art at IULM University in Milan and he was honorary professor at Brera Academy. According to his biographers,[16] Mandel is said to have published more than 200 books on arts, religions (Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, etc.), history of arts, and psychoanalysis. The number of his books should be adjusted probably to around 100 according to the title list in Worldcat, which is still an impressive number, especially since many of these books were published by prestigious Italian publishers. This intensive cultural production and presence in the public sphere were rewarded with several awards such as the *Commendatore al merito della Repubblica*, the highest-ranking honor of the Italian Republic.[17] One of his former patients told me that the role of Mandel's wife Nur-Carla Cerati is often forgotten in Mandel's hagiography. In fact, Mandel's impressive literary production was probably the product of a team, rather than the work of a single mind.

During the 1970s Mandel started studying psychoanalysis, merging Freudian, Adlerian and Jungian methods: "he was very eclectic and he did [employing different methods] according to his patient's needs," according to his daughter Paola. We will see further on how the practice of psychoanalysis was intertwined with his vision of Sufism.

Even if Mandel was raised as a Muslim and was initiated into Sufism as a teenager, it would probably be correct to argue that during the 1950s

and the 1970s his spiritual training was focused on Western esotericism and history of art, rather than on Sufism. His knowledge of Sufism before the encounter with the Jerrahiyya-Halvetiyya in the 1980s was largely based on Orientalist sources. During my interview with his daughter Paola, she wanted to stress that he belonged to a "clean Masonic lodge… For a spirit of esoteric quest;" in fact, in that period in Italy, Freemasonry, and especially the lodge of the Grande Oriente, became infamous after the public learned of the reactionary lodge P2, which had relations with neo-Fascist groups, mafia, and the secret services.[18] Mandel's interest in parapsychology in the 1970s was confirmed by Paola, who told me about a scientific study of mediumistic phenomena that her father conducted in collaboration with a priest at the Catholic University of Milan.

During my fieldwork in Milan, Mandel's Sufi disciples never showed any interest in Freemasonry or talked about it. The only reference I heard was from an Italian disciple Andrea, 35 years old, who told me during an interview that "Mandel was a sleeping Freemason," meaning that he had retired from practicing. On the other hand, Andrea had noticed that at the end of the Sufi *dhikr* performed in Milan, Mandel added some final movements that are not present in the Turkish version performed in Istanbul by other Jerrahis. Andrea suspects that these movements came from the Masonic rituals; unfortunately, I have not found any evidence to confirm or refute this interpretation.

Until the end of the 1970s, Gabriele Mandel's Sufism was shaped mainly by the writing of Shah, Nasr, and certain Orientalists, rather than practical experiences with fellow Sufis. His book *Il sufismo*, *vertice della piramide esoterica* (Sufism, summit of the esoteric pyramid)[19] reflects this fact. In 1981 Mandel met the shaykh of the Jerrahiyya-Halvetiyya, Muzzaffer Ozak (1916–1985), in his bookshop in Istanbul. Ozak was responsible for opening the Jerrahi order to the Western public and favoring the creation of new *tekkes* in Europe and in the United States.[20] Starting from this new encounter, Mandel deepened his Sufi knowledge and practice, and at the end of the 1980s he received permission (*ijāza*) to open a *tekke* in Milan. Thanks to his charisma, Mandel had, by the time of his death in 2010 at the age of 86 years, gathered almost 65 disciples, 200 sympathizers, and several patients, among whom were both lifelong Muslims and converts.

An Imagined Sufism

Gabriele Mandel explains in his first book on Sufism that there are two ways of understanding Sufism: the "informal way," presenting Sufism as universal wisdom, following the ideas of Shah, and the "orthodox and historicist way," stressing its connection with Islam, following the work of Nasr.[21]

> The informal [way] has an esoteric and initiatic nature with a transcendental tendency, and it considers of crucial importance the psychological evolution of the Self, beyond the instruments used for its realization. Hence it frees from schemes and specific limitations, such as the belonging of the disciple to the Islamic religion, knowledge of the Arabic language, and a rigoristic attitude.[22]

Shah, born during a visit by his parents to India and raised in the UK, was a prolific writer who contributed heavily to the diffusion of Sufism among the general public in Europe and North America from the 1960s to the 1980s.[23] His engaging books were translated into many European languages, often becoming best-sellers. His work was greatly appreciated by European intellectuals and artists, such as the Nobel prize laureate Doris Lessing (1919–2013) and the poet Robert Graves (1895–1985).[24] Shah was less appreciated in the academic environment, where he was often perceived as an impostor, or "pseudo-Sufi,"[25] inventing a Sufi tradition rather than disseminating one. Shah's liminal position between Sufism and the world of Western counter-culture, occultism, and Western esotericism was confirmed by his role in taking over a group of a Gurdjieffian[26] religious movement in England in the 1970s. This was a new religious movement that combined different spiritual techniques (among which were allegedly Sufi techniques), but with no trace of an Islamic heritage.[27] Finally, Shah questioned the importance of Sufi and Islamic rituals and religious norms, reducing the Sufi path to an intellectual and psychological discourse.

Completely different is the path of Nasr, born in Iran and finally an emeritus professor of Islamic studies at George Washington University in the United States. His books on Islamic studies, Sufism, and science are aimed at a specialized public, interested in metaphysical debates. Nasr was strongly influenced by the Traditionalist thought of Guénon and Schuon, who theorized a perennial philosophy—the "primordial tradition"[28] or the

"transcendent unity of religions"[29]—along with a critique of modernity.[30] Nasr's perennialism, unlike Shah's interpretation, did not imply a deconstruction of religious (Islamic) orthodoxy. On the contrary, according to Nasr and to Traditionalist interpretations, Sufism can be lived only through Islam,[31] which is probably why Mandel described Nasr as orthodox.

Nasr and Shah embody two different ways of practicing and understanding Sufism, even if at the superficial level they could be perceived as similar due to their common conception of a perennial religion that transcends religious differences. For Shah, Sufism was a malleable object to shape according to his personal and psychological interpretations, while for Nasr, Sufism was an esoteric tradition to follow and preserve. Generally speaking, these contrasting interpretations of Sufism pushed Nasr's and Shah's readers and disciples to criticize the opposite reading. In particular, psychological interpretations of spirituality have been labeled by the Traditionalist school as counter-initiatic, as the action of the Anti-Christ in the frame of an eschatological culmination.[32] Hence it is surprising to find their names next to each other, but one peculiarity of Mandel's thought was his anti-systematic approach to the sacred, creating his own understanding, and cherry-picking what he considered useful for his path.

Mandel considered both Shah's and Nasr's understandings of Sufism to be valid, but argued that Shah's Sufism was easier for the European public to embrace.[33] We can grasp Shah's impact on Mandel's first book in his citing several quotations from Sufi authors like Ahmad Yasavi (1106–1166), which are only present in Shah's books.[34] This impact is confirmed by the substantial use of the tales of Nasruddin Khoja, the wise fool found widely in folklore stories in the Islamic world, who was transformed by Shah into a Sufi teacher. These tales were gathered and adapted to the Western public by Shah and then reported by Mandel. We can also grasp Shah's influence in Mandel's tendency to discern Sufism and Sufis in every spiritual and esoteric phenomenon. Following Shah, Mandel recognizes the Sufi blueprint in Dante, Saint Francis of Assisi, Rosicrucianism, Freemasonry, and the Carbonari.[35] Mandel did not go so far as Shah in suggesting that Shakespeare could have been a Sufi in disguise, an argument supported by the deconstruction of his name as "Sheik-peer [the ancient sage]."[36]

The fact that Mandel's Sufism in the 1970s was more imagined than lived is confirmed in his first book, where he described the famous eleven principles of the Naqshbandiyya. Mandel translated *wuqūf-i zamāni*, commonly translated as "awareness of the time," as "transcendent pause,"[37] reproducing Gurdjieff's and Shah's translation, rather than Naqshbandis'.[38]

Finally, as a former disciple told me, Mandel at the beginning of the 1990s claimed that Shah was his cousin, stressing his legitimation in teaching Sufism in the West.

A Lived Sufism: The Process of Islamization

During the 1980s and 1990s the de-Islamized Sufism professed by Shah gradually vanished from Mandel's discourses, replaced by a more mainstream-orthodox interpretation that framed Sufi practices within the Islamic tradition: "there is no Sufism without Islam." This process of Islamization was due to the encounter with the Jerrahi-Halveti order, which also entailed the creation of the *tekke* in Milan. Mandel's Sufism started focusing on a collective dimension: the Jerrahi *dhikr* sessions (organized two times per month); a teaching and discussion meeting open to disciples and sympathizers (organized two times per month); an annual visit to the mother *tekke* in Istanbul open to disciples and sympathizers; and relations with Milanese Muslim communities.

Mandel's good relations with the mosque of viale Padova are confirmed by his regular participation in the Friday prayer, and by the gift of a ceramic *mihrab* (niche that indicates the direction of the Mecca) that he made himself.[39] The good relations with this non-Sufi mosque were still ongoing during my fieldwork (2013–2014), as confirmed by the participation of some disciples in the mosque's community life. Mandel's Sufism started also to attract lifelong Muslims, who were less attracted by psychoanalysis or tales of Nasruddin, but to whom his charisma and his impressive religious and secular knowledge appealed. Mohammed, a disciple aged 50 years originally from Egypt, told me how Mandel was able to discuss with everyone, even with those who were against him or Sufism, because he "was used to looking after mad people."[40] During the 1990s and the 2000s Mandel wrote many books on Islam and Sufism, including a translation of the *Quran* with commentaries: *Il Corano senza segreti* (The Quran without Secrets).[41] The importance of Islamic orthodoxy was underlined in the Italian Jerrahi magazine *Sufismo* through special issue focused on ethics and Shari'a:[42] "What is for sure is that Sufism is a mystical path exclusively present in Islam, and in order to take part in a Sufi order (outside of which one cannot call himself/herself a Sufi) it is essential to be Muslim."[43] This was reaffirmed by the Jerrahi shaykh Tuğrul Efendi in another article translated into Italian and published in the magazine *Sufismo*:

> "Sufism: the universal message of Islam." I have immediately to say that I do not agree with this definition. Sufism is not outside Islam: it is not possible that Islam is non-universal and Sufism is universal. This interpretation is not caused by a misunderstanding or by a mistake. This interpretation is due, unintentionally, to the media carpet-bombing of an excessive propaganda. Following this idea, Islam would be bad, and Sufism sweet and good.[44]

This process of Islamization, which implied a deepening of Sufi knowledge and an accent on the collective dimension, did not scratch Mandel's universal afflatus, nor his sometimes peculiar understanding of religion, which were not shared by Istanbul or by some of his more conservative Milanese disciples. First of all, Mandel privileged an individual and liberal approach to Islamic religious norms, leaving his children and disciples to decide whether to practice or not, according to their choices and desires. Hence, many Jerrahi disciples did not practice regularly, despite knowing that their leaders did. Probably, though, the most problematic aspect of Mandel's vision (from an orthodox Islamic perspective) was the belief in reincarnation.

Mandel argued that a third of the world's population agrees with the belief in reincarnation, including 40 percent of the Sufi orders, in which this belief is shared or at least tolerated.[45] It must be noted that, even if reincarnation is not considered an orthodox doctrine in Sufism or in Islam, there are some exceptions, both within the Illuminationist tradition in the case of Qutb al-Din Shirazi (1236–1311)[46] and in the case of Shaykh Burhanuddin Herrmann (born 1962), one of the leaders of the Naqshbandiyya Haqqaniyya, a contemporary fragmented Sufi order.[47] Mandel also used the search for his patients' past lives as an instrument during analysis. One patient and disciple told me that he was "diagnosed" as being Evagrius Ponticus (345–399), a Christian monk and mystic. Mandel's daughter Paola told me that this was more a technique for conducting analysis than a real belief, because her father had a "scientific background." Finally, she told me, her father used to say that "the Quran allows you to conceptualize reincarnation, it does not confirm it."[48]

Mandel's charisma mitigated possible tensions due to these beliefs; having said that, after Mandel's death in 2010 the Italian Jerrahis continued a process of Islamization, purging heterodox elements such as the idea of reincarnation. "In Istanbul they told me that Mandel was heterodox and now I have to bring the Order back on a more orthodox path," I was told by the current Italian *khalīfa*.[49] Finally, the absence of a charismatic leader

in Milan pushed Italian Jerrahi disciples to visit the Istanbul *tekke* more frequently, looking for guidance.

This process of "orthodoxization" probably started in the headquarters of the Jerrahi-Halveti in Istanbul. Shaykh Muzzaffer Ozak, who contributed greatly to the diffusion of the order in Europe and North America, probably due to his universal understanding and liberal approach to religious norms, was succeeded by Safer Dal Efendi (1926–1999) and later by Ömer Tuğrul İnançer Efendi (born 1946), a more conservative shaykh, an employee of the Ministry of Culture, less interested in the global Sufi trends,[50] and more focused on "traditional" Sufism.

The "orthodoxization" of Mandel's Jerrahi-Halveti and his new role in the Italian public sphere was probably boosted by the emergence of another charismatic Sufi leader in Milan: Abd al-Wahid Pallavicini (1926–2010), shaykh of the Ahmadiyya-Idrisiyya Shadhiliyya. The competition between these two charismatic figures was intensified by their cultural backgrounds: Pallavicini was a conservative and a follower of Guénon's esoteric metaphysics,[51] in which psychoanalysis was regarded as a parody of religion and the action of the Anti-Christ himself,[52] while Mandel was a liberal psychoanalyst, who considered Guénon a fraud and Pallavicini a psychotic.[53] These two Sufi shaykhs were two of the main Islamic figures in Italy during the 1990s and 2000s, when the interest (and the fear) of Italian public opinion in Islam was growing rapidly.

Psychoanalysis: Between the Body and the Soul

According to Mandel's interpretation, Sufi rituals and therapies based on music, dance, and colors have been the substratum of modern psychology and psychoanalysis.[54] One of his disciples explains that "the main difference between the Sufi analysis and Western psychoanalysis concerns the fact that Sufis considered this psychological method useful for all human beings,"[55] while psychoanalysts considered it useful only for patients.

Similar to his construction of Sufism, Mandel created his psychoanalytical approach by cherry-picking across different schools of thought. He used in his practice the main psychoanalytical schools of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), Alfred Alder (1870–1937), and Eric Berne (1910–1970), which were merged with Sufism, in particular with the ideas of Ibn Tufayl (1005–1085), Najm al-Din Kubra (1145–1220), and others.[56]

According to Mandel the human being is a "synergic and intertwined sum, as communicating vessels, of four parts: one spiritual, two material and one global."[57] The spiritual dimension is "a drop in the infinite ocean which is God" which longs to go back to its creator; the material part is composed of the body and the psyche, which is considered as a bridge between the body and the soul. The global one is the environment which considerably influences the human being.

Mandel regarded the psyche as a bridge between the material and the spiritual worlds. Only a clean bridge would allow a healthy spiritual life: psychotherapy is therefore preparatory for the religious path. Several disciples affirmed that there was a clear separation between patients and disciples. Having said that, for other disciples this separation was not clear at all. Furthermore, the merging of religious and psychoanalytical discourses in Mandel's works facilitated the overlapping of these two frames: according to one former patient and disciple, Mandel "used to separate these things [psychoanalysis and Sufism], but personally I've never seen them as separated. For me psychotherapy was part of the teaching… Almost everyone went [to the analysis] at least one time, but those who went frequently were few."[58]

Federico, another disciple/patient, described to me his psychological interpretation of religion:

> The concept of God is a concept that has to be removed… In the sense that it has not to be qualified. It needs to be deconstructed. For example, the figure of the [spiritual] master is idealized at the beginning in a sort of narcissistic mirroring… These are two different languages [Sufism and psychoanalysis], but the destination is the same. For me these languages are fundamentally the same. Because there is an important place for dialogue. Dialogue is the essence of our *tariqa*, also in Turkey.[59]

According to Mandel, religious experience is inscribed in the human body. Following this perspective, mystical experiences could be described as neurological reactions. This "material dimension" of the soul does not imply that the religious experience is "less true." "This so-called sixth sense connects all the beings among them, but the human being, probably, is the only creature on the planet capable of consciously perceiving it. This perception provokes in the brain ecstatic and mystical phenomena, as if a world divided in two, would reunite together."[60]

This scientization and psychologization of the religious experience are discernible also in Mandel's elaborations of Alexander Lowen's (1910–2008) bioenergetic analysis, in which psychological conditions were treated by focusing primarily on the body. This is translated by Mandel into the Islamic and Sufi framework, where rituals become instruments for curing the psyche through the body. For example, Federico, a patient/disciple, explained: "The Islamic prayer, from a bioenergetic point of view, gradually breaks unconscious contractures. The Islamic prayer acts on some body parts, where generally speaking the contractures are located. The same thing is [valid] for the *dhikr*, which, with a rhythmic respiration, little by little works on the diaphragm and later on the throat."

One of Mandel's disciples, Nazzareno Venturi, considered Lowen's interpretation so similar to Mandel's ideas that it allowed him to write that "only a Sufi could have written it."[61] These interpretations were quite common among the disciples I met; another example is that night prayers improve the quality of sleep, and *dhikr* helps the oxygenation of the brain.

Another common concept employed by Mandel and his disciples was the concept of "synchronicity" coined by Carl Gustav Jung, explained as events with no causal relationship, yet connected by a deep meaning.[62] Synchronic events allow the human being to grasp fragments of a deeper order, expression of an ineffable spiritual reality,[63] a conception that resonates also with quantum mysticism[64] and its spiritual interpretation of space-time paradoxes. All of these elements—quantum mysticism and synchronic events—are used in the description of the *dhikr* by Mandel's disciples:

> In the *dhikr* the emotional state is powerful and reinvigorated by movements and by breathing techniques. This is everything that is needed for synchronic events to happen. This is why [during the *dhikr*] there are leaps of perception, rich personal symbols to interpret: visions, colours, images, and sounds. This is why leaps of space-time happened, due to the relativity of space-time, peculiar to synchronicity.[65]

To conclude, I would like to point out that the merging of Mandel's understanding of religions and his psychologization of mysticism and the Jerrahi-Halveti Sufism was possible because there are important resonances between them.[66] In the Jerrahiyya-Halvetiyya it is a common practice that the disciple discusses about dreams, visions, and images that he may have experienced with his shaykh, which resonates with the

relationship between the analyst and the patient. Furthermore, the accent on the *adāb*—ethical behavior—is a common topic in Sufism. Finally, the influence of Plotinus (one of Mandel's favorite authors) in Sufism is well known. This does not imply that the Turkish Jerrahiyya-Halvetiyya would endorse Mandel's philosophy, but there are enough assonances to allow an interaction and a negotiation between the "orthodox mainstream" Sufism and Mandel's peculiar thought.

A Diffused Knowledge and an Immanent Universalism

Unlike mainstream Islamic narrative which identifies different religions as the historical revelations of a divine message, Mandel focuses on the body and the mind of the human being. According to this perspective, faith is an impulse of the unconscious present in all human beings, which is lived and normalized by religious and social norms called "religion."

> The Sufi had understood the huge difference between faith and religion. The first is a natural impulse in every human being, as part of the third level of the unconscious (art, faith and civic-mindedness). The second is the bureaucratization of the faith, necessary for behavioural norms and the regulation of the living together.[67]

Mandel's universalism is immanent in the sense that it is based on the psychological and physiological universality of the human body and psyche. Following Mandel's interpretations of humankind, bigotry, violence, and intolerance are not caused by false or corrupted religious traditions, but are rather the expressions of psychotic disorders, which can be more or less present in specific sociohistorical contexts. This is a conceptualization that differs from other forms of universalism, such as the Traditionalist-Guénonian perennialism,[68] which identified a primordial tradition, common to all the religions, which was transmitted more or less successfully down the centuries. Remaining in the same city of Milan, we can grasp this difference by comparing Mandel with Pallavicini, a Guénonian Sufi who considered that his Sufi order embodied one of the last expressions of the primordial tradition. Pallavicini considered that the primordial tradition was not being transmitted in other religious phenomena, including some Sufi orders described by him as merely exoteric or, in the worst case, as parodistic.[69]

Mandel's universalism is also different from that of the Sufi Order International[70] and of Shah, which included a process of de-Islamization and, in the case of Shah, implied also an anti-exoteric and anti-dogmatic attitude, where rituals, norms, and meetings were considered childish.[71] Finally, Mandel's universalism also differs from the "inclusive universalism" of the ʿAlawiyya and Budshishiyya,[72] which is mainly based on Quranic and Sufi sources. These Sufi orders have liberal and sometimes progressive approaches to *fiqh*, but they do not consider religious norms to be "bureaucracy." They rather consider religious norms to be frames in which flourishing can take place, as has been argued by the scholar Saba Mahmood.[73]

For Mandel, individual freedom was paramount, which was probably due both to biographical circumstances (raised in a mixed marriage by a Muslim father and a Jewish mother, as well as being a victim of Fascism) and for epistemological reasons: psychoanalysis is strictly connected to the process of emancipation, where the patient is no more treated as a passive actor, but as the agent of his freedom. On the other hand, this universalism and the accent on freedom did not imply that he did not respect religious norms. On the contrary, according to his daughter Paola, he did not appreciate "New Age tendencies, which could be summarized that a Westerner thinks that he can do in six months what an Indian could do in six lives;"[74] tendencies that were present in his *tekke* among his disciples though, as his patient/disciple Andrea explained: "Several disciples remained in a New Age phase of Mandel, not because Mandel was New Age, but because they understood Mandel in a New Age way. But he let it go. On the other hand, when you asked him something [about religious norms] he replied that the five *ṣalāt* [prayers] have to be done."[75]

Despite his passion for Nasr and Shah, Mandel viewed both Gurdjieff and Guénon as frauds (as a disciple told me, Mandel called them *peracottari*, boors). The first for stealing practices, rituals, and notions from different religious traditions, creating his own way, and the second for his rigid and over simplistic understanding of religion and society, and for claiming an authority on esoteric and exoteric orthodoxies. Furthermore, Mandel rejected the separation between the West and the East on which much of Western esotericisms are based, including those of Guénon and Gurdjieff; "I think that there is nothing new under the sun, humankind is like this today as 1,000 years ago and 3,000 years ago. There is absolutely nothing new. Islam does not conceptualize the idea of progress… There are no East and West, there are only human beings."[76]

In his books and interviews, Mandel would jump from Plotinus to the Quran, from quantum mysticism to psychoanalysis, from Freemasonry to Sufism, and so on, in a sort of multicultural and multi-epistemological universalism. Paola commented on this cultural multiplicity, saying that "he couldn't be too orthodox for his nature and experience," because he was the result of three different cultures (Islamic, Jewish, and Classical).

Mandel was anti-systemic in his understanding of humanity. According to his perspective, fragments of truths could be traced in every religious phenomenon, and also outside of them: "[e]very religion is like a fragment of a mirror, in each one we can see ourselves, but only the big mirror represents God. And there is no divinity except God. The One. The Unique."[77] These fragments of sacred knowledge need a religious authority, a performer, an exegete, or a translator to be grasped.

> Religions are as many as leaves on an oak branch;
> Every one possesses its "own" true,
> but no one possesses "the True."
> Every one leads to the good, preaching the upright Way,
> the ethical behavior and the feeling of the Divine.[78]

This anti-systemic approach to knowledge is evident in one of his late definitions of Sufism, beyond Shah's and Nasr's frames: "Following different interpretations of the historical origins of Sufism, Sufism could be described as the fruit of Oriental philosophies, or of Western mysticism, or as the result of the sum of Western and Eastern knowledge. [But this is not the point.] Sufism represents the essence of humanity, it as shapeshifting as humanity itself, in a constant transformation."[79]

This shapeshifting and ineffable conception of a sacred knowledge is not particularly original, in fact, its roots can be found in Neoplatonism and in the apophatic theology, and it is diffused in contemporary alternative spiritualities. Mandel professed a diffused and fragmented esoteric knowledge that could be grasped by several actors in different social and cultural contexts, religious and secular alike. Probably, we could better describe Mandel's *Weltanschauung* as a diffused or intermittent knowledge that rejects apodictic truths and implies the presence of doubt, as Mandel explains in a document where he talks about his cancer:

> Now you all know that I have a lung cancer, you know that the chemotherapy is heavy to endure. And that the path toward the recovery is long

> and full of contingencies. I am happy about that. Why? Because I was in a moment of my life where my Sufi evolution was not improving anymore, in a moment where I was even doubting the existence of God, in a moment in which nothing satisfied me, and I did not have the desire to do anything, almost as if the source of my inspiration that fed me for almost sixty years of my life was exhausted. And here: this situation, on the other hand, teaches me a lot, the evolution regained power, I still learn, I still improve.[80]

Mandel's words on religion and universality resonate strongly with transcendental philosophy and the contemporary psychology of William James (1842–1910). For these authors mysticism was a "form of eternal, universal spirituality, beyond the limits of any specific religion or time period… Mysticism became the connection thread of a universal religion."[81] A universality of the psychological bodily experience also included altered states of consciousness caused by drugs, echoing the work of Aldous Huxley (1894–1963):[82] "Materiality is vibration, the ways of quantum physics, mysticism, and the way of certain hallucinogens are going in the same direction."[83]

Some scholars argued that the psychologization of mysticism implied also: an essentialization of organized religions, which became "second hand," because the true religion could be found only in the sphere of subjectivity; in the case of William James, the alienation of mystical experience to ineffability and inaccessibility; and the privatization and domestication of mysticism, which loses every political and social connotation and the power of transforming societies.[84]

Despite the similarities between Mandel's understanding of religion and the previously described "psychologization of mysticism," it would be analytically wrong to treat Mandel as privatized, secularized, and domesticated. In fact, despite some peculiar beliefs, Mandel was an important figure in the Italian Islamic community and in the public sphere. Furthermore, some former disciples even complained about his attraction to pan-Turkism and Kemalism.

A Fragmented Sufi Order

While Mandel's diffused sacred knowledge did not imply a deconstruction of religious norms and practices, it did have an impact on the organizational structure of the Italian Jerrahiyya-Halvetiyya. Different people were looking for different experiences: lifelong Muslims were generally

interested in Islamic and Sufi experiences, New Age spiritual seekers were looking for the teachings of Shah and Gurdjieff, patients were looking for psychological health.

Mandel's followers were divided into three porous groups: patients, disciples, and fellow-travelers. The fellow-travelers were non-Sufis or non-Muslims who were interested in Sufism and participated in collective debates every two weeks, as well in the visit to Istanbul. These cultural and religious heterogeneities were only held together by Mandel's charisma, and they exploded after Mandel's death. Many claimed his spiritual legacy and the *tekke* almost dissolved. The group numbered 100 people in 2010 and around 10 in 2013. If the "absolute knowledge" that characterizes Pallavicini's Sufi order implies a strong internal cohesion and tension toward society, justifying spiritual and political elitism, Mandel's diffused knowledge implied weak bonds, based on his charisma. One patient/disciple said, "I felt a great confidence in him. I also told him, I'm Muslim because you're Muslim. If he were Hindu, I would have been Hindu. Because he embodied such a human quality that I couldn't define. That was visible in the details. If this man follows this path, I want to do it as well."[85] For another:

> The first thing I noticed in him was his enormous erudition. I called him the "walking library." The first thing that marked me was the distinction between faith and religion. The religion is nothing else than the bureaucratization of faith…. It became a father-son relationship. I was more moved by the death of the master, than by the death of my father. I did love my father, but the feeling that I had for the master was cultivated, it grew day by day.[86]

During my fieldwork in 2013–2014, three or four years after Mandel's death, his name, ideas, and memories of him were still at the center of the Italian Jerrahi-Halveti. So central in fact, that after a few months I realized that I did not know the name of the current shaykh (Tuğrul Efendi), because he was so rarely quoted. Paola commented critically on this emotional attachment: "I don't think this is healthy, they have to give my father the right to die." Having said that, as I showed, the Italian Jerrahiyya-Halvetiyya is little by little moving its focus to the mother *tekke* in Istanbul. The small group who survived Mandel's departure will probably continue the process of Islamization and Sufi-ization. The psychoanalytical, bioenergetic, Freemasonic elements are destined to fade.

Conclusions

Sufi orders in Europe and North America could easily be labeled as "hybrid." On the other hand, this category risks being a tautology, since almost every Sufi order is shaped by local influences. This is also true for "transplanted"[87] Sufi orders composed only of migrants and ethnically characterized, such as the Tijaniyya and the Muridiyya, but even these Sufi orders, little by little, have been changing and adapting to the European and North American contexts.[88] The point is not if there is a process of hybridization going on, but rather how this process is evolving. Another common adjective used to describe Sufi orders in Europe and North America is "universal." As I showed in this chapter, there are several ways of understanding universality, and the relation between Islam and the religious Other. These different ideas imply also different outcomes in organizational structures and politics.

The Guénonian-Traditionalist and the Theosophical Society approaches have had a great impact on Western Sufism, influencing and sometimes shaping ideas and practices of both lifelong Muslim and converts. These encompassing theories on religions and societies have defined what universality means within the Sufi context.

Gabriele Mandel's intellectual and religious path was different. Mandel was one of the first Italian lifelong Muslims of the twentieth century, in fact, he was raised as a Muslim and he studied Arabic and Islamic studies, but at the same time, he was trained in classical literature, philosophy, and psychoanalysis. The quest for a mystical East that characterized both the Theosophical Society and the Guénonian-Traditionalist school was absent, as the anti-modernist spirit present in the Guénonian-Traditionalist school.

As I have shown, Mandel's understanding of (religious) universalism focused on: ethical behavior; the bodily experience; and the concept of the One. Mandel professed a diffused and scattered esoteric knowledge that could be grasped by diverse actors (religious and secular alike) in multiple social and cultural contexts. This allows us to position Mandel next to many philosophers (Transcendentalists), psychoanalysts (Jungians), and historians (religionists)[89] who worked on comparative religions and universality. Unlike philosophers, psychoanalysts, and historians, Mandel's path was not only theoretical and his engagement with the Jerrahiyya-Halvetiyya pushed him to focus on Islamic and Sufi sources, in a process of "orthodox-ization."

Notes

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CHAPTER 10

Sufism and the Enneagram

Mark Sedgwick

The Enneagram (see Fig. 10.1) is a geometric figure that was described by the Armenian esotericist George Gurdjieff (1866–1949) as a "universal symbol."[1] Since its first documented use by Gurdjieff in Russia in 1916, it has been put to many and varying purposes; if not exactly universal, it has certainly become global, with Wikipedia pages in 32 languages, including Yiddish, Indonesian, and Chinese. The front cover of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Power of the Enneagram*, a book in a bestselling series that covers everything from computers to backpacking, encourages the potential purchaser to "Use the enneagram to enrich—and understand—every aspect of your life."[2] In its most widespread contemporary form, as the "Enneagram of personality" assisted by the Riso-Hudson Enneagram Type Indicator (RHETI), the Enneagram rivals the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), now probably the world's most popular personality test. According to *CNN Business*, the Enneagram can be used as a management tool to achieve "better communication and collaboration, rising sales and increase in employee engagement."[3]

Those who promote the Enneagram of personality, the Riso-Hudson Enneagram Type Indicator, and the usefulness of the Enneagram for

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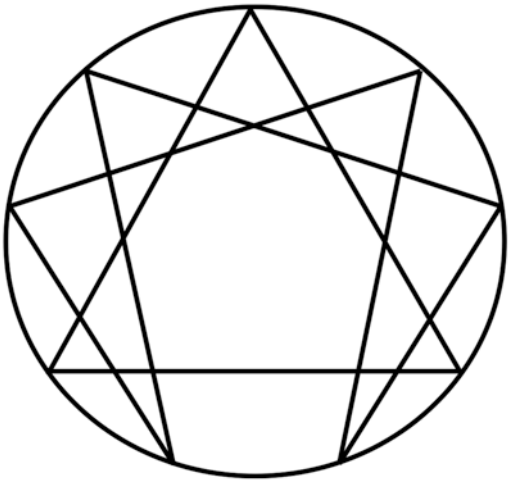

Fig. 10.1 The Enneagram

increasing sales generally present the Enneagram as modern and scientific, and while they may refer in passing to Gurdjieff and possible ancient inspirations, they normally downplay the esoteric origins of the Enneagram. Most followers of Gurdjieff's "Fourth Way," in contrast, see the Enneagram not as a personality test but as a universal symbol of ancient and esoteric origin. A third understanding sees the Enneagram not as esoteric but as Sufi. Comparable alternative understandings that lie beyond the scope of this chapter also identify the Enneagram with Catholic Christianity and with the Kabbalah.[4]

This chapter first traces the main line of development of the esoteric Enneagram from its earliest documented use by Gurdjieff in 1916 to today's Enneagram of personality, a line in which Sufism barely features, then explains the appropriation of the Enneagram by Sufis, and finally explores uses of the Enneagram by Sufis today. This chapter, then, examines a transfer from Western esotericism to Sufism, but will also note some transfers in the opposite direction.

The Enneagram

Although this chapter is more concerned with the development, use, and understanding of the Enneagram than with the Enneagram itself, a brief description is still needed. It is not possible to provide one simple explanation of how the Enneagram works and how it is used, as it is used in so

many different ways. Some of the significance of the features described below will become clear later.

Ennea is the Greek for nine, and the Enneagram is so called because it is made of nine straight lines and has nine corners. The nine-pointed star (used as a symbol the Bahá'í Faith) is also an enneagram. The Enneagram with which this chapter is concerned resembles a nine-pointed star but lacks two of the lines that are present in a regular enneagram (Fig. 10.2); it is thus technically an irregular enneagram. References to "the Enneagram" in this chapter are references to the irregular enneagram first used by Gurdjieff in 1916 (Fig. 10.1), not to the regular enneagram.

The (irregular) Enneagram (of Gurdjieff) is surrounded by a circle. It is composed of three elements: the circle, an equilateral triangle (Fig. 10.3) that is said to represent the "Law of Three," and an irregular hexagram (Fig. 10.4), made, like a hexagon, of six lines with six corners. The Star of David (Fig. 10.5) is a regular hexagram, equilateral and equiangular. The hexagram used in the Enneagram, in contrast, is unicursal and irregular. The hexagram is said to incorporate the "Law of Seven" into the Enneagram.

The relation between the Law of Three and the (three-angled) triangle, and hence the Enneagram, is obvious. The relation between the Law of Seven and the Enneagram is less obvious, as the hexagram has six points,

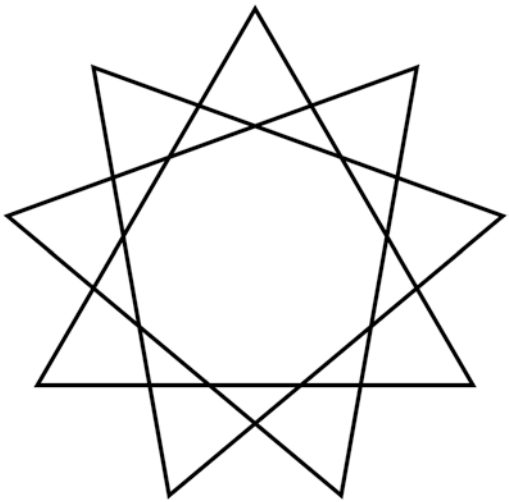

Fig. 10.2 A regular enneagram

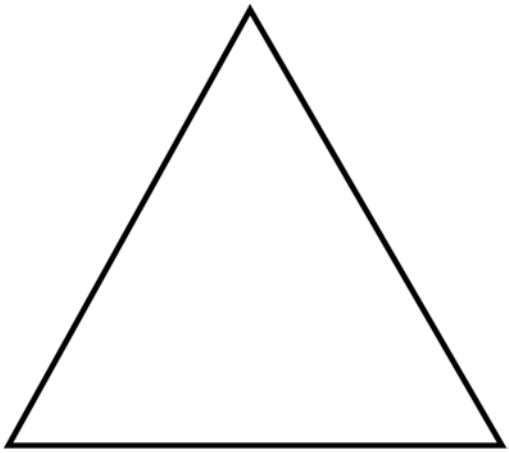

Fig. 10.3 An equilateral triangle

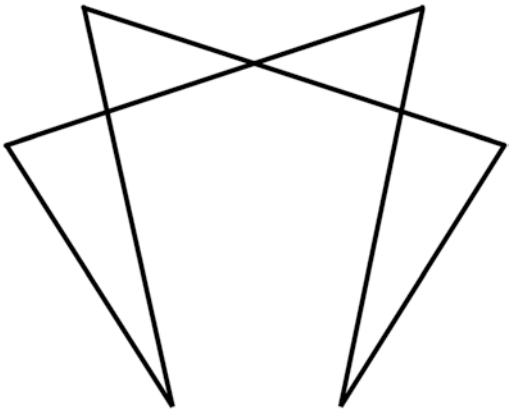

Fig. 10.4 An irregular hexagram

not seven. One way in which the "law of seven" impacts the Enneagram is through a mathematical operation: 1 ÷ 7 = 0.142857… (the symbol… indicates that the sequence 142857 repeats indefinitely, i.e. 1 ÷ 7 = 0.142857142857…). The numbers 142857 trace the hexagram within the Enneagram (Fig. 10.6).

Gurdjieff's collaborator and chronicler Peter Ouspensky (1878–1947) reported the use of the Enneagram in St. Petersburg in 1916, and the earliest known surviving representation of the Enneagram is from 1919, when it was used to frame a portrait of a stylized man and four symbolic

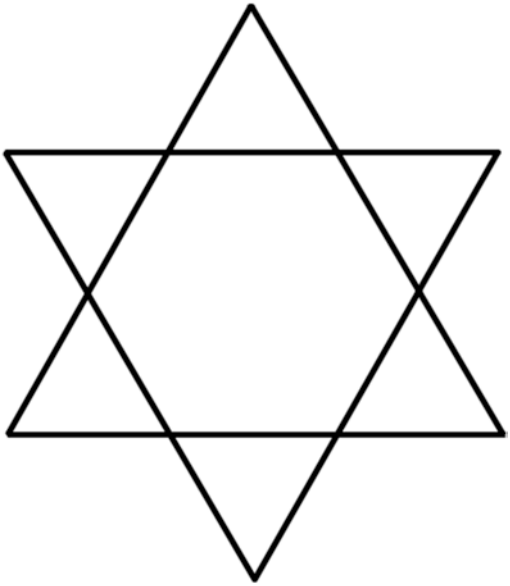

Fig. 10.5 A regular hexagram

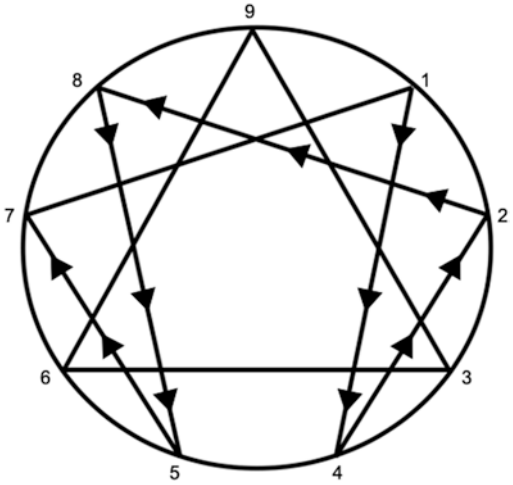

Fig. 10.6 The Law of Seven

animals in an advertisement for the *Nauka o garmonicheskago razvitiya chelov'ka* (Science of the harmonious development of man) that Gurdjieff attempted to teach in Tiflis (now Tbilisi), Georgia.[5] Given this direct evidence from 1919, the report of use in 1916 is certainly plausible.

The Enneagram used in 1916 and 1919 certainly has earlier inspirations or origins, but it has not been possible to establish with any certainty what these are. No representations earlier than 1919 have been found, though James Webb, for example, has pointed to the regular enneagrams shown in Ramon Llull's *Ars magna generalis et ultima* (1305) and in the frontispiece of Athanasius Kircher's *Arithmologia* (1665).[6] These enneagrams, however, are regular nine-pointed stars; they are not the same as Gurdjieff's irregular enneagram. Regular nine-pointed stars are found in many places.

As Joscelyn Godwin has pointed out, the Enneagram is one of many geometric "attempts at universal description," another being the "archéomètre" of the French occultist Alexandre Saint-Yves, Marquis d'Alveydre (1842–1909), which it in some ways resembles,[7] and which became well known in Parisian occultist circles after 1910.[8] As Saint-Yves had a Russian wife,[9] it is possible that his work was known in St. Petersburg, where French occultist works were anyhow read. The archéomètre, however, is based on the number 12.[10] Godwin suggests that such systems echo the tables of correspondences in the *De occulta philosophia* (On occult philosophy) of Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535).[11]

Many have sought the origins of the Enneagram in accounts of Gurdjieff's early life as a member of a group of friends called the Seekers After Truth,[12] but these accounts are evidently fantastical, and have never been confirmed in any respect. They resemble accounts of the early life of Helena Blavatsky (1831–91), the founder of the Theosophical Society, who legitimized her teachings by reference to far-off and exotic places and quasi-divine hidden masters. Blavatsky's "foundation myth" is important, but best treated as myth, and the same is true of Gurdjieff's foundation myth.

Beyond myth, the numbers three, seven, and nine have been assigned special significance in many human civilizations, as have geometric figures from the triangle to the hexagon, and such numbers and figures were widely used during the century preceding 1916, as in previous centuries. Gurdjieff and his later companions might thus have encountered the inspiration for the Enneagram almost anywhere. This chapter, then, will simply regard the Enneagram as Gurdjieff's own invention.

During Gurdjieff's lifetime the Enneagram functioned as the logo of his movement, from the 1919 advertisement to a very similar advertisement used in France in 1923. An Enneagram hung over the stage at Gurdjieff's Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man in Fontainebleau, France,[13] and a pair of enneagrams sewed in mother-of-pearl to a black background hung on either side of the fireplace of the Paris apartment in which Gurdjieff was living at the time of his death in 1949.[14] The Enneagram was also used as a teaching device, though there are no details of exactly how, and as a pattern to be traced during some of the Movements,[15] the complex ritual dances that formed and still form a central part of the Gurdjieff "Work," as the practice of the Fourth Way is known.

The Main Line of the Development and Spread of the Enneagram

From 1919 onwards, the development and spread of the Enneagram can be traced fairly easily, building on the work of Sophia Wellbeloved and Carole Cusack.[16] It passes through Ouspensky in London to the USA of the "high" New Age, but by an unusual route, taking in Mexico, Argentina, and Chile.

Ouspensky

After Gurdjieff's death, the main line of development of the Enneagram underwent a series of modifications. This line is primarily esoteric, and passes through Gurdjieff's most prominent follower, Ouspensky. Ouspensky is one of the major sources for the teachings of Gurdjieff, which he claimed merely to report but which he may in fact have at least partly authored. His posthumous book *In Search of the Miraculous* (1949) contains the first printed discussion of the Enneagram, presented as universal symbol.[17] To what extent Ouspensky's Enneagram is Gurdjieff's own and to what extent it has been reinterpreted by Ouspensky is impossible to say. Ouspensky also quotes Gurdjieff to explain a distinction that will become crucial to later understandings of the Enneagram, between essence and personality. Our essence is our own and real, what we are born with; personality is false, acquired through education and example. The hold of personality over essence has to be restrained so that that essence

can be developed. If not, there is a risk that essence may die, leaving only personality. This is not unusual. "A considerable percentage of people we meet in the streets of a great town are people who are empty inside; that is, they are *already dead*."[18]

Collin

One of the closest followers of Ouspensky in his later years was an Englishman, Rodney Collin (1909–56), who moved to Mexico after Ouspensky's death, accompanied by some English followers. He launched a number of projects,[19] including a press that published Spanish translations of Ouspensky's works, starting with *In Search of the Miraculous* in 1952, and also some of Collin's own works. There had already been some earlier interest in Ouspensky in Mexico,[20] and as time passed, Collin's following became more and more Mexican; by 1954 he was teaching mostly in Spanish.[21] He sent followers to teach elsewhere in Latin America, primarily to Chile, Peru, Uruguay, and Argentina.[22] There was also a Fourth Way group in Venezuela, led by Jacques Etievan (1920–73), who visited Buenos Aires in 1957.[23] Little is known of the branch of the Fourth Way that he founded in Argentina beyond that it experienced some problems, and then ceased to exist.[24] The first lasting presence of the Fourth Way in Argentina was established in 1966.[25] That the Fourth Way was present in Argentina in the late 1950s, however, was important for the later transmission of the Enneagram, as we will see.

Collin's own works included *El desarrollo de la luz* (The Development of Light, 1952), which followed Gurdjieff's and Ouspensky's distinction between essence and personality,[26] and included a description of the Enneagram,[27] again following Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. Collin took the Enneagram in a new direction by matching its nine points with nine "types of humanity" (*tipos de la humanidad*) derived from astrology: mercurial types, jovial types, martial types, and so on.[28] "Human types" (*tipos humanos*) are elsewhere defined as types of essence,[29] so Collin's Enneagram might be descried as the Enneagram of essences. This was Collin's major contribution to the development of the Enneagram.

Silo

The Enneagram also interested the leader of a quasi-Fourth Way group in Argentina, Silo (1938–2010, also known as Mario Rodríguez Cobos). It

is unclear how Silo learned of the Fourth Way, but the group he formed during the 1960s in his birthplace, the western Argentinian city of Mendoza, used a form of the Fourth Way "stop" exercise and forms of "shock" treatment.[30] It also used the Enneagram as a basis for a version of the Gurdjieff Movements, with participants walking around a large Enneagram that was drawn outdoors with stones,[31] combining this with breathing exercises as part of a six-part program to break the automatic functions and achieve consciousness of self,[32] a very Fourth Way objective and formulation. Like Collin, Silo followed Gurdjieff's and Ouspensky's distinction between essence and personality, and included a description of the Enneagram, again following Gurdjieff and Ouspensky.[33] His group probably derived in some way from the 1957 Etievan group; it shows no signs of influence from Collin.

Silo's contribution to the development of the Enneagram was the development of an "operative" *eneagrama sextenario* (Enneagram of six), an alternative to the standard "expositive" Enneagram of seven,[34] that could be used to describe the human psycho-physical functions (digestive, respiratory, sanguinary, cerebral, spinal, and sexual),[35] lunar cycles,[36] and even smells.[37] Although interesting, the Enneagram of six does not seem to have been taken up by anyone else.

Silo's followers in the mid-1960s were mostly Argentinian, but there were also some Chileans, including Bruno von Ehrenberg Pincheira (born 1938), who we will encounter below.[38] Silo became famous in 1969 when he launched Poder Joven (Youth Power), an unusual revolutionary movement inspired by both Herbert Marcuse and Gurdjieff, based on the idea that external violence (e.g., economic violence) resulted from inner suffering, which in turn derived from the ego. Poder Joven was forced out of Argentina into Chile, and then repressed also in Chile, but later spread around the world with Chilean refugees from the Pinochet dictatorship.[39] Reformulated during the 1980s as the Humanist Movement, it acquired a large worldwide following—one newspaper (over-)estimated a million persons[40]—but placed no real emphasis on the Enneagram.

Óscar Ichazo

The next major contribution to the development of the Enneagram was made by Óscar Ichazo (born 1931), a Bolivian who started reading Ouspensky in 1949 (the year of first publication of *In Search of the Miraculous*), and in 1950 traveled to Buenos Aires where he joined "a

closed study group of Theosophists, esoteric Rosicrucians, and Martinists, where [he] participated in long discussions about the work of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky."[41] No such group can be identified from other sources, but something of the kind may well have existed, as a translation of Ouspensky's *Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution* was published in Buenos Aires in 1952,[42] indicating an interest in Ouspensky even before Etievan's visit in 1957. Alternatively, Ichazo may have encountered the Etievan group, but confused the dates. Another possibility is Silo; Ichazo was also in contact with Silo's Chilean representative, Ehrenberg, by 1963.[43]

In 1967, Ichazo was introduced by Ehrenberg to a Chilean poet from Silo, Marcos Llona (born 1929), who invited Ichazo to Arica in northern Chile, where he was living. Ichazo established there an Instituto de Gnoseología (Institute of Gnoseology).[44] After lecturing in Santiago in 1968,[45] Ichazo developed, in Arica and Santiago, a variety of experimental spiritual and psychological practices. He taught the distinction between essence and personality, which he equated to ego. "We call the intellectual part of the ego the fixation," he explained in an interview in 1973, "and each fixation is remedied by an idea." This he illustrated with the Enneagram, adjusted to show possible fixations—resentment, flattery, vanity, and so on.[46] The Enneagram of fixations was used to identify fixations so as to break them.[47] The Enneagram of fixations is Ichazo's distinctive contribution to the development of the Enneagram. It might have been an independent development of Ouspenksy's Enneagram (as Silo's Enneagram of six was), or might have been a further development of Collin's Enneagram of human types; Collin's *El desarrollo de la luz* was available in Argentina in 1957,[48] and was presumably also available elsewhere in Latin America.

Claudio Naranjo

One of those who heard of Ichazo's teachings was a Chilean psychologist living in the US, Claudio Naranjo (born 1932). Naranjo had gone from initial medical training in Chile to postgraduate work at Harvard and then Berkeley,[49] where he met the guru Alan Watts (1915–73), the Harvard psychiatrist Timothy Leary (1920–96), and the anthropologist Carlos Castaneda (1925–98).[50] He was introduced by his Berkeley contacts to the group at Esalen, Big Sur, California,[51] that lay at the heart of what became known as Transpersonal Psychology and the Human Potential Movement, a movement that—like Naranjo himself—combined

psychiatry, psychology, esotericism, and psychedelics.[52] In the view of Jeffrey J. Kripal, although many at Esalen talked of bringing together Asian religion and Western psychotherapy, it was primarily Naranjo who actually did this.[53]

In 1970, Naranjo traveled to Chile to meet Ichazo, who an old friend had written to him about, and briefly became a follower of his.[54] Naranjo also brought a large group from Esalen to Arica, and this later helped Ichazo move from Chile to the US, where he established a grand version of the Arica program in New York City, initially charging $3,000 (about $20,000 today) for a three-month course, including food and lodging at an upscale hotel.[55] Naranjo also established his own US-based group, called Seekers After Truth (SAT), the name given to the (mythical) group of Gurdjieff's early companions.[56] Naranjo taught the fundamental distinction between essence and personality, much as Ichazo had taught it,[57] but simplified Ichazo's Enneagram, replacing his "fixations" with "personality types": the perfectionist, the giver, the reformer, and so on. The result was the "Enneagram of personality," Naranjo's decisive contribution to the development of the Enneagram. Naranjo's personality types in some ways echoed Collin's "types of humanity," but were not derived from astrology.

The "Enneagram of personality" as taught in the US by SAT and then by a pupil of Naranjo's at Loyola University Chicago, a leading Catholic institution, proved extremely successful. One of those who studied it was Don Richard Riso (1946–2012), who joined with Russ Hudson to develop a battery of pairs of forced-choice statements known as the Riso-Hudson Enneagram Type Indicator, the answers to which allowed the precise allocation of one of Naranjo's nine personality types. This is the form in which the Enneagram joined such other personality tests as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and the older Rorschach inkblot test.[58]

The Main Line

The Enneagram, then, traveled a long way from its first visible use as a universal symbol in Tiflis during the Russian civil war to the Riso-Hudson Enneagram Type Indicator. All that the two really have in common is the form of the symbol, the number nine, and the underlying idea of the possibility and the desirability of the development of human consciousness, an idea to which all involved in the development of the esoteric Enneagram subscribed. The uses to which the Enneagram was put within this

framework, from astrological types to analysis of smells, and from fixations to personality types, shared little more than this. The Enneagram proved to be a universal symbol, just as Gurdjieff said.

The Attribution of Sufi Origins to the Enneagram

The account of the main line of the development of the Enneagram has made no reference to Sufism, as Sufism played only a marginal role in it. There are, however, connections between some of the key figures mentioned above and Sufism. Crucially, Gurdjieff himself had some knowledge of Sufism, and his accounts of his adventures with the (original) Seekers After Truth include references to meetings with various dervishes, and especially to an encounter with a "dervish" (Sufi) called Bogga-Eddin and a dervish group called the Sarmoung.[59] Bogga-Eddin is not a name known in any other context, and there is no known Sufi group with a name resembling Sarmoung.

Unlike Gurdjieff, Ouspensky had no particular interest in Sufism, and neither did Collin nor Silo. This was not the case, however, with J. G. Bennett (1897–1974), an English follower of both Gurdjieff and Ouspensky who established his own Fourth Way group in England after Gurdjieff's death. Bennett was determined to find the sources of Gurdjieff's teaching, and became convinced that the Sufis were central. This was partly because of Gurdjieff's own references to dervishes, and also probably partly because Bennett had already had some experience of Sufism in Turkey before meeting Gurdjieff, while serving in Turkey with the British army after the end of the First World War. In 1952, Bennett returned to the Middle East. He spoke good Turkish but no Arabic. Sufism was then still banned in Turkey, and Bennett moved on to Damascus, where he met some Turkish-speaking Naqshbandi shaykhs, one of whom was Abdullah Daghestani (1891–1973). After spending some time living as a devout Sufi, Bennett concluded that the Sufis he had met did not have the secret of Gurdjieff's teaching, and returned to England.[60] Even so, he continued to stress the Sufi origins of Gurdjieff's teaching. He traced a line of transmission from the Zoroastrians to the Khwajas (Khwajagan), and thence to the Naqshbandis and the "Sarmān or Sarmoun," from whom, he believed, Gurdjieff had received the Enneagram.[61] The Khwajagan are a well-documented Central Asian Sufi group of the twelfth to fifteenth centuries that indeed merged into the Naqshbandiyya.

Though Bennett stressed the Sufi origins of the Enneagram, his understanding of the meaning and use of the Enneagram was little changed by his encounter with Sufism. Like Ouspensky, he understood it primarily as a universal symbol, and as a means of understanding and describing complex processes. The standard example he used to explain the Enneagram referred to the preparation and consumption of food in a large community.[62] A follower of Bennett who was the Chief Engineer of General Motors in the UK applied the Enneagram in similar fashion to the operations of a car factory.[63] Related understandings are found in the journal that Bennett founded, *Systematics*. Bennett's Sufi Enneagram was Sufi in its origins, then, but not in its application.

Bennett's identification of the Sufi origins of the Enneagram was followed by a younger Englishman, Idries Shah (1924–96), who became the twentieth-century West's most widely read writer on Sufism. The Afghan Sufi origins of Gurdjieff's teaching and of the Enneagram are stressed in a travel article published in 1965[64] and in *The Teachers of Gurdjieff* (1966), both of which are pseudonymous and widely assumed to have been written by Shah. The Enneagram is also mentioned in a book published under Shah's own name, *The Commanding Self* (1994), which again associated the Enneagram with Sufism.[65] Shah wrote much less about the Enneagram than Bennett did, but the impact of his works on general understandings of Sufism was so great that even these few references were important, contributing to the understanding of the Enneagram as being of Sufi origin. Since Shah never expressed a clear view about what the Enneagram was or did, however, his Sufi Enneagram was no more Sufi in its application than was Bennett's.

The Sarmoung may also have been identified as the origin of the Enneagram by Ichazo,[66] who also had an interest in Sufism. He traveled to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kashmir, and the Pamirs in 1956,[67] and again in 1970.[68] He taught his followers about the *quṭb* (pole, axis), about Shayṭān (Satan), and his role in relation to the ego, about the usefulness of *baraka* (divine blessings) against Shayṭān, and even about the risks of attracting the attention of the *jinn* (demons) if one talks about them too much.[69] The one report we have of these teachings is a bit sketchy on some of the details, but it is clear that standard Sufi and Islamic doctrine was being taught, if not always fully understood. There was also Sufi practice: a modified form of *dhikr* (the classic Sufi prayer ceremony) in New York in 1975, using standard *dhikr* movements and the Islamic divine name "Hu," but also using the non-Sufi phrase "Toham Kum Rah," probably a variation

on a Buddhist mantra. *Dhikr* was identified by Ichazo as Sufi, Sufism was identified with "Mohammed, the Messenger," and Ichazo noted that "*Zhikr* [*sic*] has been passed to me by direct transmission within true tradition." At the end of the *Zhikr*, there was the possibility of being initiated by Ichazo in a ritual that was, again, close to standard Sufi norms.[70] Arica was not a Sufi order, however. There were also many teachings and practices that had nothing to do with Sufism, including two people sitting opposite each other in the lotus position and staring into each other's left eyes, massage in the bath using a wooden spoon handle, and non-exclusive sexual unions,[71] though quite what this meant in practice is not clear. As we have seen, there was nothing particularly Sufi about Ichazo's understanding or application of the Enneagram.

Naranjo also had Sufi connections, having belonged from the late 1960s to an unusual Hermetic universalist Sufi group led by Omar Ali-Shah (1922–2005), the brother of Idries Shah.[72] He also followed the Turkish Mevlevi shaykh Suleyman Loras (1904–85), who visited the US in 1976 and 1978, and for some years practiced Mevlevi turning.[73] He gave Sufism as one of the main sources of the teachings of his SAT group, along with Gurdjieff and Ichazo,[74] and had at least one student, who was convinced that the Enneagram was of Sufi origin, citing Bennett.[75] Again, however, there was nothing particularly Sufi about his understanding or application of the Enneagram.

The identification of the Sufi origins of the Enneagram was completed by Shaykh Hisham Kabbani (born 1945), the Lebanese-American *khalīfa* (representative) in the US of Shaykh Nazim (1922–2014), a Turkish-Cypriot Naqshbandi who had followed the Shaykh Abdullah Daghestani who Bennett had visited in Damascus, and later became the most globally important Sufi shaykh of his time. Kabbani was one of Shaykh Nazim's most influential followers. According to Kabbani, Gurdjieff had visited the Naqshbandi Shaykh Sharaf al-Din Daghestani (1875–1936) and was received by Shaykh Abdullah, who not only gave him the secret of the Enneagram in a vision, but also gave him the Muslim name Abdul Nur.[76] Gurdjieff himself becomes a Sufi in this story, then, not just the Enneagram.

Gurdjieff might conceivably have visited Shaykh Sharaf al-Din, although there is no other record of this, as when Gurdjieff was in Constantinople (now Istanbul) in 1920–1921, Shaykh Sharaf al-Din was living in Reshadiye, Bursa Vilayet (now Güneyköy, Yalova Province), 45 miles (70 kilometers) across the Sea of Marmara from Constantinople. He might in that case have been received by Shaykh Abdullah, who was then about

thirty years old. He cannot, however, have taken the Enneagram from Shaykh Abdullah, since—as we have seen—the Enneagram was already in use in 1916 and 1919, several years before Gurdjieff reached Constantinople. It seems likely, then, that Kabbani confused the 1952 visit to Shaykh Abdullah of Gurdjieff's follower Bennett with a visit to Shaykh Abdullah by Gurdjieff himself, and then placed this visit in the period during which Gurdjieff was in Constantinople. The resulting story cannot be historically true. It is, however, widely believed to be true in Naqshbandi circles. Kabbani himself has made no use of the Enneagram, but as we will see, several of Shaykh Nazim's followers have.

The Enneagram as Sufi Practice

Although Bennett, Shah, and Kabbani promoted the idea of the Enneagram as of Sufi origin, a view that was given further credence by the Sufi connections of Ichazo and Naranjo, none of these developed any specifically Sufi understanding of the Enneagram's meaning or application. This was the work of four other Sufis, all of whom were followers of the Naqshbandiyya of Shaykh Nazim. This grew to become a vast global order which it would have been almost impossible to run as a centralized organization; this was, anyhow, never attempted. There was thus considerable local variety, and all four of the Naqshbandis who developed the Enneagram as Sufi practice did so as individuals. Shaykh Nazim himself is not known ever to have spoken of the Enneagram, save occasionally in responding to what others said to him, and the Enneagram never became a central aspect of Naqshbandi teaching or practice. Most Naqshbandis have no interest in the Enneagram. Those who did have such an impact, however, completed the transfer of the Enneagram from the realm of esotericism into the realm of Islam.

Laleh Bakhtiar

The first person to develop a specifically Sufi understanding and application of the Enneagram was Laleh Bakhtiar (born 1938), an American of partly Iranian origin who had lived for many years in Iran, where she was part of the Traditionalist movement founded by the French esotericist and Sufi René Guénon (1886–1951). She returned to the US in 1979, and followed both Javad Nurbaksh (1926–2008), an Iranian Nimatullahi shaykh who was also a psychiatrist,[77] and the Naqshbandiyya, becoming

one of its leaders in Chicago.[78] She also studied Counseling Psychology at the University of New Mexico at Albuquerque, which is where she was introduced to the Enneagram, and told that it was of Sufi origin,[79] presumably because of the Sufi associations of Ichazo and Naranjo.

Bakhtiar, having been told that the Enneagram was Sufi, looked for the Sufism in it, found none, and concluded that its Sufi significance had been lost and needed to be restored. In several books, the first of which was published in 1993,[80] she developed an understanding of the Enneagram that incorporated the cosmology of Ibn al-'Arabi and the emphasis of mainstream Sufism on the greater jihad against the *nafs* (lower self). She condemned the Enneagram of personality for leaving the *nafs* unchanged, for "reinforcing the negative,"[81] and argued that people always have a mixture of the nine personality types, not one type only.[82] Instead she proposed a system built around Plato's four virtues: wisdom, temperance, courage, and justice. Plato was not, of course, a Sufi, but Bakhtiar takes the perennialist position that "Islamic culture and civilization embraced every tradition which preceded it that did not go against belief in the Oneness of God."[83] She also cites the great Sufi Shah Wali Allah al-Dihlawi (1703–62) (perhaps inaccurately) as listing Plato's four cardinal virtues in his *Altaf al-quds*.[84] A person may have too much or too little of wisdom, temperance, or courage, or possibly none at all, giving rise to nine possible vices that can be mapped onto the nine points of the Enneagram; justice either exists or does not, and so cannot be mapped in this way.[85]

The objective is to move from vice to virtue, and thus to "moral and ethical balance," to be "morally healed [and] ready for the world of intuition." The "inward return journey" includes overcoming "obstacles and barrier brought on by the nurturing process—the environment in which we grew up." It also involves progressing through seven stages relating to each of the virtues. In the case of the transition from lust to temperance, for example, these are "resolve (submission), hope-fear, piety, moderation, tranquility, spiritual poverty, and self-restraint."[86] Bakhtiar is here re-expressing standard Sufi teachings in contemporary psycho-spiritual terms. "Moral healing" is her translation of *murū'a* (approximately, virtue).[87] "The world of intuition" can be understood in terms of the *'ālam mithālī*, Henry Corbin's "imaginal world." The idea of an "inward return journey" is central to Sufi theology, which often refers to the path and the traveler. It is not generally thought by Sufis that this journey starts with overcoming the consequences of our nurturing—that is an idea that seems to come from Ichazo and his fixations—but the stages of the journey listed

by Bakhtiar are classic Sufism: her "resolve (submission)" is *tawba*, her "hope-fear" is *taqwā*, and so on.

As well as writing about the Enneagram, Bakhtiar offers an online course on the Sufi Enneagram in four parts, costing $100 each, starting with an introduction to "the greater struggle" (*al-jihād al-akbar*), moving through "turning toward God" (*tawba*) to "the healing work," and ending with "moving toward intuition."[88] By 2016, 800 people had taken the Sufi Enneagram course.[89] It is described not as Islamic but as "the journey of the Monotheist," a monotheist being one who believes that "there is no god, but God."[90] This is, of course, a translation of the first part of the *shahāda* (testimony of faith). No mention is made of the second part of the *shahāda*, of the Prophet Muhammad, or the Quran; there is thus no reason for Christians or Jews not to regard themselves as monotheists.

Bakhtiar's Sufi Enneagram also spread back to Iran, where it was presented as Iranian rather than Sufi, probably because of the controversial status of Sufism in the Islamic republic. An Iranian living in Tehran, Mahshid Razavi Rezvani, found Bakhtiar's work, and incorporated it in her own use of the Enneagram for counseling purposes.[91] Bakhtiar traveled and lectured on the Enneagram in Iran,[92] and published her *Sufi Enneagram*, translated as *Noh Ganeh Irani* (The Iranian Enneagram), in 2018/19 (1397).[93]

Amanoullah de Vos

The second practitioner of the Sufi Enneagram was Amanoullah de Vos (born c. 1948, originally Phillipe de Vos),[94] a French Traditionalist who had followed the Guénonian shaykh Mustafa Vâlsan (1907–74, originally Mihai/Michel Vâlsan),[95] and who, as a young man, had driven to Rome to meet Guénon's legendary but controversial collaborator, Julius Evola (1898–1974).[96] He studied with Martine Gercault, a follower of the Transpersonal psychologist Stanislav Grof (born 1931),[97] who had spent 1973–87 at Esalen, and who developed a theory of four "basic perinatal matrices"[98] that resembled Ichazo's fixations. This may be how he encountered the Enneagram. The discussion of the Enneagram's modern history in his *L'ennéagramme dans la pratique soufie* (The Enneagram in Sufi practice) shows a good knowledge with all the main practitioners discussed in this chapter.[99] In 1989, Vos became a follower of Shaykh Nazim.[100] He accepted Bennett's understanding of the Sufi (and notably Naqshbandi) origins of Gurdjieff's teaching, and Kabbani's account of Gurdjieff's

meeting with Shaykh Abdullah, both of which he repeats in *L'ennéagramme dans la pratique soufie*.[101]

Vos has taught courses on the four phases of birth following Grof's model,[102] and follows Ichazo in his understanding of fixations, which he relates to the ego or *nafs*. He uses Naranjo's personality types, however, each of which is matched to an Islamic virtue. The perfectionist is thus a deformation of the virtue of self-criticism, which equates to *tawba*, the first stage of the Sufi journey, exactly as for Bakhtiar. The altruist is a deformation of service, equating to *'ibādah* (service or worship). Similar identifications are made for the remaining personality types.[103]

Vos has also taught courses on the Enneagram, in France and abroad, including in Morocco.[104] A video of a course in Casablanca in 2017 shows a large and appreciative audience drawn from the Casablanca elite, mostly female, and mostly under the age of 35. Vos spoke well (in French), mixing Quranic quotations in Arabic with his explanation of the Enneagram, and making effective use of humor.[105] A rather smaller course in France, attended by a researcher in 2014, lasted two days and cost €150, including meals. There were seven participates: two Naqshbandis, two from other French *ṭarīqas*, and three non-Muslims. During the first part of the course, participants lay on the floor, listened to electronic music, remembered their childhood "to find their true nature," and talked about their hopes and fears so that Vos could identify their personality type, described as an "archetype." Once each participant's personality type had been identified, the participant was given a simple *dhikr* to perform, typically one of the divine names. The objective was said to be to unify one's life with one's archetype and bring out the positive aspects of that archetype.[106] Vos's application of the Enneagram, then, resembles the application of Bakhtiar, but is somewhat closer to Ichazo's practice.

Hamidah Torres

The third practitioner of the Sufi Enneagram was also a follower of Shaykh Nazim, Hamidah Torres von Drechsel, an Argentinian who learned the Enneagram with a Fourth Way group in Mar del Plata, Argentina.[107] This was probably the group led by Abdul Nur Rocatti (also known as Eduardo Rocatti), a psychologist and Fourth Way teacher who joined the Naqshbandiyya in 1985 or 1986, bringing his Fourth Way followers with him.[108] Rocatti was an enthusiast of the Enneagram, and the mosque that

he built in Mar del Plata was decorated with an Enneagram,[109] which is (so far as is known) a unique combination.

Torres lived for some time in Germany with her German husband, Burhanuddin Herrmann (born 1962), a Naqshbandi who was active in Europe and Argentina, and then returned to Argentina in 2019 after divorcing Hermann.[110] Her understanding of the Enneagram remained close to that of Ichazo, focusing on the Enneagram of fixations and the Enneagram of passions. Her point of departure was, once again, the classic distinction between essence and personality and the process whereby the growth of personality leads to the forgetting of essence.[111] Torres in the only one of the four Sufi teachers of the Enneagram not to have written a book on the topic, but by 2019 she was routinely giving Enneagram courses in Argentina, Colombia, Italy, and China, often in cooperation with Hermann.[112] She has also taught the Sufi Enneagram in China, where she was part of a larger Enneagram conference in Shenzhen in 2017 attended by, among others, Hudson (of the Riso-Hudson Enneagram Type Indicator).[113]

Torres's courses are eclectic. One sample program covers separate topics including "essence and personality" (Fourth Way), "Sadr, Qalb, Sirr" (Sufism), "Tricentral man" (Gurdjieff), before combining the Sufi and the topics such as "*dhikr* of the nine points" and "enneagram of the stations of the soul (maqam ul nafs)."[114] She, too, is close to Ichazo's practice.

Abdul Karim Baudino

Finally, the fourth practitioner of the Sufi Enneagram was yet another follower of Shaykh Nazim, Abdul Karim Baudino (born 1969), an Argentinian who joined the Naqshbandiyya in 1994 after following a number of other spiritual paths in his youth. Unlike Bakhtiar and Vos, he was never a Traditionalist, but appreciates the work of Guénon. He first heard of the Enneagram from other Naqshbandis, and then learned the Enneagram from someone who had studied with Ichazo. He refers to Gurdjieff as Abdul Nur, the name given to him in Kabbani's account.[115]

Baudino started giving Enneagram classes in 2005, initially in Argentina but then also in Spain, where his then father-in-law lived. By 2019, he was also giving classes in Italy, Portugal, Chile, Brazil, and Ecuador; Spain and Brazil were the most successful. Most of the people who came to his seminars were psychotherapists or counselors who knew Naranjo's Enneagram of personality, and had no real interest in Sufism. Since people are

interested in psychology, he explained in an interview, that is where you have to start, but *dhikr* and the Islamic ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*) are often included in his program, and many participants end by joining the Naqshbandiyya (giving *bayʿa*).[116] It seems, however, that this is more symbolic than marking the start of the Sufi path, as Baudino himself does not have a significant following.

Like Bakhtiar, Baudino also offers online courses, in two modules, one of five and the other of seven months, costing $200 per month. The 2019 version of module one was team-taught by Baudino, another Naqshbandi (Abdul Karim Tabares), and Hasan Bize (born 1953, also known as Gustavo Bize), a Qadiri and probably Argentina's leading academic scholar of Sufism. Baudino taught the classes on the Sufi Enneagram, Bize taught the classes on Sufism, and Tabares taught the classes on "practical applications"— *muḥāsaba* (self-examination), *khayāl* (imagination), *rābiṭa* (mystical connection), and so on.[117] The course thus mixed what was indisputably Sufi and Islamic, taught by Bize, with a Naqshbandi understanding of Sufi practice, taught by Tabares, and the Enneagram, taught by Baudino.

Baudino's understanding of the Enneagram is hard to classify. He follows Kabbani not only in understanding the Enneagram as Sufi but also in understanding Gurdjieff as a Sufi. He refers to Gudjieff as if he were a Sufi *walī* (saint).[118] In *El eneagrama sufi: iniciación a las enseñanzas khwajagan* (The Sufi Enneagram: Introduction to the teachings of the Khwajas), Gurdjieff is referenced 55 times, and the Prophet Muhammad only 15 times,[119] and Baudino follows the connection between Gurdjieff and the Khwajas posited by Bennett.

Baudino's Enneagram is very Gurdjieffian. He starts in chapter one with the Law of Three, explained in terms of positive, negative, and equilibrium,[120] following Ouspensky and Gurdjieff. The Law of Seven[121] also follows the standard explanation of Ouspensky and Gurdjieff. The chapter on fixations follows Ichazo, reproducing his enneagrams of fixation and of the passions.[122] Another chapter, in contrast, is more Islamic, or at least Akbarian, explaining birth as passing from the world of unity into the world of duality, in which (using Gurdjieffian terms) consciousness becomes separated from essence. What is needed then is to remember God, which Gurdjieff called becoming conscious.[123] The chapter is based on a lecture given in 2013, and at this point in the lecture someone asked "So Gurdjieff secularized Sufism?" Yes, replied Baudino, in the sense that Gurdjieff taught the essentials of Sufism in terms that did not awaken

religious associations among skeptical Westerners, but not in the sense that Gurdjieff thought that anything could be achieved "without the intervention of a superior power."[124] For Baudino, then, the Fourth Way and Sufism are the same. To try to disentangle the two in his works would be a difficult task, but it is easier to find passages that are purely Fourth Way (or Ichazo) than to find passages that could be described as purely Islamic.

Conclusions

The Enneagram, then, is of esoteric origin. Although there have been nine-pointed stars and multiple uses of the numbers three, seven, and nine for centuries, the irregular enneagram with which this chapter is concerned is unknown before 1916, and is first found in the circles around Gurdjieff. Although Gurdjieff's myth of origin includes mentions of dervishes, the connection between the Enneagram and Sufism really dates only from the 1950s, when Bennett argued for a Sufi origin for the Fourth Way as a whole. Most practitioners of the Enneagram of personality today gloss over the Enneagram's origins, presenting it more as scientific than as esoteric or Sufi, but some are convinced of the Enneagram's Sufi origins, following either the Enneagram's loose identification with Sufism via Ichazo and Naranjo (as is the case with Bakhtiar) or its definite identification as Sufi by Bennett, Shah, and Kabbani (as is the case with Torres, Vos, and Baudino). Bakhtiar, Torres, Vos, and Baudino have further developed distinctively Sufi understandings of the Enneagram, and have used these understandings to promote Sufism.

This story reveals something about both Western esotericism and something about Western Sufism. Firstly, it shows how global Western esotericism has become, raising once again the question of how useful the label "Western" is. The Enneagram is first reported in St. Petersburg, from where it traveled to its first visual appearance in Tiflis, to the east of Turkey. The Enneagram then appears in Paris, and passes from there via London to Mexico City, and then Buenos Aires and Arica. These Latin American cities are probably in the West, but in a part of the West that is clearly different from London or Paris. From Arica there begins the return journey to the "core" West when the Enneagram arrives at Esalen, and passes via New Mexico to Bakhtiar in Chicago. From there it passes to China and to Tehran, clearly not in the West. The total journey by this route from St. Petersburg to Tehran is some 30,000 miles (45,000 kilometers), one-eighth of the way to the moon.

The story also illustrates two further features of Western esotericism. One is that many people are fascinated by numbers and geometrical figures, a fascination that is far from exclusive to esotericism in the West, and may be a key feature of one aspect of esotericism everywhere. The other is that there is a tendency for the esoteric to simplify as it passes into the general culture. This point was made about the whole Esalen phenomenon by Olav Hammer, who noted that some ideas and practices were absorbed in watered-down form into mainstream psychotherapy, while others vanished or entered the category of "rejected knowledge."[125] This is also true of the Enneagram. The Enneagram of personality as used in the Riso-Hudson Enneagram Type Indicator is considerably simpler than the Enneagram developed by Icahzo, with its fixations, traps, and passions.

The relationship between the Enneagram and Sufism also tells us something about Sufism in the West. Firstly, it shows how the transfer from esotericism into Sufism can result in the esotericization of Sufism. Bakhtiar, Vos, Torres, and Baudino all teach Sufism, but the Sufism they teach contains elements of esoteric origin, more in some cases than in others. Secondly, however, it shows that esotericism can be Sufi-ized. Those who become interested in the Enneagram as part of an interest in esotericism may be led to Sufism either indirectly, through stories of the Enneagram's Sufi origins, or directly, through participation in the courses in the Enneagram and in Sufi psychology taught by Bakhtiar, Vos, Torres, or Baudino. The transfer, then, is not unidirectional.

Notes

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17. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 294–95, 376–78.
18. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 161–65.
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20. A Spanish translation of Ouepsmy's *Tertium organum* had already been published in 1937, as *Tertium organum: una clave para los misterios del mundo* (México: Ediciones Botas, 1937).
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24. Giménez Noble, *El trabajo de Gurdjieff*, 73.
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27. Collin, *Desarollo*, 77–89.
28. Collin, *Desarollo*, 169.
29. Collin, *Desarollo*, 168.
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31. Sergio Huneeus, interview, Santiago de Chile, 2018.
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PART III

Constructions

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CHAPTER 11

"A Remarkable Resemblance:" Comparative Mysticism and the Study of Sufism and Kabbalah

Boaz Huss

An article on Judaism and Sufism by a renowned scholar of Judaism and Islam, which was published in 2003, opens with these words:

> Upon catching sight today in the synagogues of Safed or Jerusalem of the white-clad, bearded kabbalists, engrossed in their meditations, one is unavoidably struck by the similarity in appearance with the swaying, white-capped Sufis performing the *dhikr* ritual. In point of fact, the similarity is not only external; of all forms of mysticism, perhaps an unsuspected and yet remarkable parallelism exists between Islamic and Jewish mysticism… Within the wider framework of the influence of Islamic thought and spirituality, the study of the interaction between Israel and Ishmael in the domain of mysticism is one of the most fascinating chapters of comparative religion.[1]

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The author of the article, Paul Fenton, connects the external similarity that he observed between meditating white-clad bearded Kabbalists and swaying white-capped Sufis to the remarkable parallelism, which he says exists between Islamic and Jewish mysticism. I cannot dispute the author's subjective impression of the similarity in appearance between contemporary Kabbalists and Sufis, although I was not unavoidably struck by such a likeness in my observations of contemporary Kabbalists and Sufis (possibly, I visited different synagogues and different *dhikr* rituals). However, I would like to historicize and problematize the presuppositions concerning the significant interactions and remarkable parallelism between Kabbalah and Sufism, as well as the identification of these movements as Jewish and Islamic mysticism.

Since the nineteenth century, Western scholars researched the resemblance and transfer of doctrines and practices between Kabbalah and Sufism and suggested that these movements represent Jewish and Islamic mysticism. These ideas became prevalent among the broader public, and they are especially popular among neo-Sufi and neo-Kbbalistic circles and interfaith activists.

This chapter will survey the evidence concerning the historical connections between Kabbalah and Sufism and discuss the history of the academic study of Sufism and Kabbalah and its reception by the general public. It will show that although there is some resemblance between ideas and practices of some Kabbalistic and Sufi circles, there is evidence of only very few historical interactions between Kabbalists and Sufis. The connections between Kabbalah and Sufism were dependent mostly on shared sources, rather than on personal encounters. Notwithstanding the scarcity of historical evidence, scholars (and following them, neo-Kabbalists and neo-Sufis) emphasize the resemblance between Kabbalah and Sufism and offer speculations concerning possible historical interactions between them. Although cultural transfers also existed between non-Sufi Islamic circles (such as Ismaili and other Shi'i movements) and Kabbalah, and although Sufism had a considerable impact on Jewish movements other than Kabbalah, such as on the Jewish theologian Bahya ibn Paquda (1050–1120) and the Jewish pietistic movement in Egypt, scholars and practitioners emphasize especially the Kabbalistic–Sufi connections. This chapter will show that the pervasive notion concerning the proximity and remarkable resemblance of Sufism and Kabbalah is dependent on the definition and interpretation of these traditions as expressions of a universal, mystical, religious phenomenon. It will argue that the perception of Sufism and Kabbala as Islamic and Jewish mysticism encouraged the comparisons and the search for possible historical connections between them and

shaped the ways academics study these traditions, as well as the ways they are perceived, appropriated, and practiced in contemporary Western societies.

Sufism and Kabbalah: Shared Sources and Historical Encounters

There are several interesting connections and cultural transfers between Sufism and Kabbalah. Philosophical—especially Neoplatonic—sources were an important source for both Sufis and Kabbalists.[2] As Mark Sedgwick noted, "The theology of the Kabbalah… is clearly indebted to Neoplatonism, just as the theology of Sufism is."[3] Furthermore, some Sufi Muslim sources, such as two Sufi works of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058–1111) that were translated to Hebrew, may have reached Jewish Kabbalists.[4] The Sufi-inspired work of the eleventh-century Jewish theologian Bahya ibn Paquda, *Hovot ha-Levavot* (The Duties of the Heart), which was composed originally in Judeo-Arabic, had a considerable influence on Kabbalah and Hassidism.[5] There is also a possibility that some of the writings of the Jewish pietistic movement in Egypt in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which was highly indebted to Sufism, had an impact on Kabbalah.[6]

Apart from the shared philosophic sources of Sufism and Kabbalah, and the acquaintance of Kabbalist with Sufi-inspired Jewish texts, and possibly with some Muslim Sufi writings, there were a few cases of direct encounters between Jewish Kabbalists and Muslim Sufis. Evidence of an acquaintance with Sufi doctrines and practices is found in the book *Sharei Tzedek* (The Portals of Justice) that was written in the land of Israel in the late thirteenth century, probably by Nathan ben Saadiah Harar,[7] a disciple of Abraham Abulafia (1240–1291):

> The vulgar way is that which, so I learned, is practiced by Moslem ascetics… Upon enquiry, I learned that they summon the Name, Allah, as it is in the language of Ishmael. I investigated further and I found that, when they pronounce these letters, they direct their thought completely away from every possible "natural form," and the very letters Allah and their diverse powers work upon them. They are carried off into a trance without realizing how, since no tradition [Kabbalah] has been transmitted to them. This removal of all natural forms and images from the soul is called with them Effacement.[8]

Gershom Scholem (1897–1982) pointed out that this book "is the only book amongst the Kabbalistic books known today, that mentions and describes explicitly the ways of the Sufis, the esotericists of the Islam."[9] It is possible that Harar's teacher, Abraham Abulafia, the founder of the school of prophetic Kabbalah, who was rejected by mainstream Kabbalists of his time, was also acquainted with Sufi teachings and practices. Nonetheless, Abulafia does not mention Muslim Sufis in his writings.[10]

In the early sixteenth century, the famous Jewish Talmudic scholar and Kabbalist Joseph Karo (1488–1575) mentions that he visited a *tekke*, the Turkish word for a Sufi center (*khānqā* or *zāwiya* in Arabic): "we passed the door of the *tekyeh* with some friends, and they took me inside for a walk. That night I had a nocturnal emission and I was very upset."[11] The visit probably took place in Adrianopol or Nicopolis, before Karo immigrated to Safed. Karo does not mention if he encountered Sufis during the visit, or if he observed any Sufi practices. According to Karo, the *Maggid*—a heavenly mentor that used to speak through his mouth—reprimanded him for entering the place.[12]

Connections between Kabbalah and Sufism occurred also in a later period, in the framework of the Sabbatean movement and its aftermath. There is evidence that the messianic contender Sabbatai Zevi (1626–1676), who converted to Islam, had friendly relation with the Sufi leader and poet Muhammad Niyazi (a.k.a Niyazi Misri, 1616–1674).[13] Members of the Donmeh, the Sabbatean believers who converted to Islam and continued to adhere to some Kabbalistic teachings and practices, later had connections with the Bektashi Sufi order.[14]

Encounters between Kabbalah and Sufism occurred also among modern, neo-Sufi, and neo-Kabbalistic circles in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Some of the followers of the founder of the Sufi Order in the West, Hazrat Inayat Khan (1882–1927), such as Ada Martin (1871–1947) and Samuel Lewis (a.k.a Sufi Sam, 1896–1971), were interested in Kabbalah.[15] The Jewish Sufi disciples of Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998), who were active in Lausanne in the mid-twentieth century, were also interested in Kabbalah.[16] Zalman Schachter-Shalomi (1924–2014), one of the leaders of the neo-Hassidic Jewish renewal movement, was initiated into Sufism in 1975 by Inayat Khan's son Vilayat Khan (1916–2004).[17] In contemporary Israel, there are a few Western Sufi groups, whose members are mostly Jewish, who are also interested in Kabbalah. One of these groups is the Israeli Jewish–Muslim Sufi order, The Path of Abraham (*Derekh Avraham/Tariqat Ibrahim*), whose leaders and activists include the scholars Avraham Elqayam, and Paul Fenton.[18]

The Academic Study of Sufism and Kabbalah

Throughout history, there were many cultural transfers between Judaism and Islam. Notwithstanding the immense scope and variety of the social and cultural encounters between Jews and Muslims through the generations and the dearth of evidence concerning personal contacts between Kabbalists and Sufis, scholars, and the broader public find particular interest in the connections between Sufism and Kabbalah. They highlight the evidence concerning interactions between Kabbalists and Sufis, offer speculations concerning other possible encounters between Sufism and Kabbalah, and affirm the resemblance between them.

The first to suggest a connection between Kabbalah and Sufism was the protestant scholar, theologian, and missionary Friedrich August Tholuck (1799–1877). In his *De Ortu Cabbalae* (On the Origins of the Kabbalah), published in Hamburg in 1837, Tholuck argued that Kabbalah was historically dependent on Sufism.[19] The Jewish scholar, rabbi, and preacher from Vienna, Adolf Jellinek (1821–1893), accepted the idea that Sufism had a strong influence on the development of Kabbalah.[20] In 1851, he published an article entitled "Sufismus in der Kabbala" (Sufism in the Kabbalah) in the journal *Der Orient*, in which he suggested the possible Sufi influence on the Kabbalist R. Isaac of Acre.[21] Jellinek was the first to point out the similarities between thirteenth-century Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia and Sufism.[22] In his study of Abulafia, published in 1854, Jellinek described him as "a mystic enthusiast in the full sense of the word—a Jewish Sufi."[23] In the early twentieth century, the rabbi and scholar Ariel Bension (1880–1932) suggested in his book *The Zohar in Moslem and Christian Spain* that there are many shared concepts between Sufism, especially, the writing of the Sufi philosopher and poet Ibn al-ʿArabi (1165–1240), and the canonical text of Kabbalah, *Sefer ha-Zohar*, which was composed in the late thirteenth century.[24]

Gershom Scholem, the founder of modern research of Kabbalah, rejected Tholuck's opinion that Kabbalah was dependent on Sufism.[25] In his overview of the historical development of Kabbalah, first published in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, he mentioned the Jewish Sufi school of Abraham the son of Maimonides that was active in Egypt in the late Middle Ages, but asserted that this school "found no echo in the Kabbalah."[26] Scholem noted the indirect influence of the eleventh-century Sufi-inspired Jewish text, *Hovot ha-Levavot* (Duties of the Hearts) by Bahya ibn Paquda, on Kabbalists.[27] He was the first scholar to note the explicit description of Sufi

ideas and practices in the book *Sharei Tzedek* (Gates of Justice) and suggested the possibility that the author received this information from his teacher, Abraham Abulafia. If so, Scholem writes, the "Sufi guise" of the Prophetic Kabbalah "was created under the direct and unmediated influence of Arab Sufism, and not only in parallel to it."[28] Scholem observed that it would have been logical to look for possible influence of Sufi sources on the sixteenth-century forms of Kabbalah that developed in the Middle East. Nonetheless, he says that there are no traces of such influence and concludes: "One wonders why the Kabbalists of Safed, Jerusalem, Damascus or Cairo who lived all their lives in the immediate proximity of great centers of Sufic circles and masters, never took any notice of them in their writings."[29]

Scholem also noted the evidence concerning the friendship between Sabbatai Zevi and Muhammad Niyazi and the influence of the Bektashis on the teaching and practices of the Donmeh.[30] He observed the "obvious points of similarity" between the Kabbalah of the eighteenth-century Kabbalist Shalom Sharabi (d. 1777) that was practiced in the Jerusalem Yeshiva Bet El and Muslim Sufism.[31] Yet, he did not elaborate on this resemblance in his research.

The resemblance and connections between Kabbalah and Sufism were also emphasized in later Kabbalah scholarship. Scholars argued that the resemblance between Kabbalah and Sufism was greater than recognized by Scholem and criticized him for neglecting the study of Sufi-Kabbalistic connections.[32] Paul Fenton claimed that since the publication of Jellinek's "Sufismus in der Kabbalah" in 1851, "this area of comparative study received little attention."[33]

Moshe Idel and Paul Fenton studied the connections of Abraham Abulafia and his school to Sufism, and suggested that the practice of *hitbodedut* (solitary meditation) in Prophetic Kabbalah was derived from Sufism.[34] Paul Fenton offered further speculations concerning the relations between Sabbatai Zevi and Muhamed Niyazi.[35] Avraham Elqayam suggested that the main characteristics of Sabbatai Zevi's mystical personality are dependent on his acquaintance with radical Sufi mysticism. He highlighted the connections of Zevi to Niyazi and other contemporary Sufis and suggested various similarities between Sabbatean and Sufi doctrines and practices.[36]

Scholars have raised further speculations concerning the acquaintance of other Kabbalistic and Hassidic schools with Sufi ideas and practices. Michael McGaha claimed that *Sefer ha-Bahir* (Book of Brightness), considered by scholars as the earliest Kabbalistic text, can only be properly

understood in the context of Ḥurūfism, the Sufi science of letters.[37] Yet, as other scholars have noted, he did not bring convincing proofs for this claim.[38] Harvey Hames suggested the possibility that Abulafia was acquainted with the works Ibn al-ʿArabi, although he noted that Abulafia does not directly cite any of Ibn al-ʿArabi's writings.[39] Ronald Keiner developed the idea, suggested previously by Ariel Bension, concerning the possible influence of Ibn al-ʿArabi on the Zohar, although he noted that there is no historical evidence that the authors of the Zohar read Ibn al-ʿArabi.[40] Recently, Avishai Bar-Asher pointed out further resemblance between themes found in the Zohar and in Ibn al-ʿArabi's writings.[41] Nonetheless, Bar-Asher also noted that there is no historical evidence to support the conjecture that Jewish scholars in the thirteenth century were acquainted with Ibn al-ʿArabi's writings.[42]

As mentioned above, Joseph Karo, a leading Halachic authority and a Kabbalist, visited a *tekke* in the early sixteenth century. Avraham Elqayam speculated that Karo did not only visit the Sufi center but also participated in a *dhikr* ritual, in which the participants tore their clothes and danced naked (a practice not documented elsewhere). According to Elqayam, the nocturnal emission Karo mentions was the result of a homoerotic phantasy, stimulated by the sight of the naked dancing Sufis. Elqayam suggested that the reproach of the Magid, Karo's celestial mentor, reflects Karo's ambivalent attraction and repulsion from Sufi spirituality.[43] As Jonathan Garb remarked, as interesting as this analysis is, it is very much to build on the few lines from Karo's diary.[44]

Paul Fenton suggested that the revival of interest in *hitbodedut* as well as other Kabbalistic practices such as visitation of saints' tombs, wanderings (*gerushin*), and spiritual concerts (*bakashot*) in Safed in the sixteenth century were possibly influenced by Sufism.[45] He claimed that the archeological discovery of a *zāwiya* of the Rifa'i Sufi order in Safed corroborates his claim that Sufism had a considerable influence on Kabbalistic practices there.[46]

Scholars have also suggested that Sufism had an impact on eighteenth-century East European Hassidic practices and doctrines, not only through indirect textual channels, but also through oral transmission and direct encounters.[47] Paul Fenton observed that "it is interesting to speculate to what extent Sufi ideas percolated into Podolia and influenced the nascent Hasidic movement. The veneration of the *zaddik* (Hassidic saint), visiting the tombs of saints, the importance of music and dance as forms of

worship provide very striking and thought-provoking analogies to Sufi models."[48]

Fenton concluded that there is a remarkable parallelism and resemblance between Islamic and Jewish mysticism, and that Sufism had a long and significant impact on Kabbalah and Hasidism.[49] Similarly, Moshe Idel asserted that: "Muslim Mysticism should be recognized as an important source of influence on Jewish Mysticism, especially, in its contribution to augmenting the radical mystical element, and in details concerning mystical techniques. There is no doubt that the influence of Sufism on Kabbalah is greater than of Christian Mysticism."[50]

Scholars were not only interested in the shared sources and historical encounters between Sufism and Kabbalah, but also claimed that there is a phenomenological resemblance between what they perceive as the esoteric and mystical trends of Judaism and Islam. Scholars claim that Kabbalah and Sufism share essential common traits and characteristics that are not dependent on the historical contacts between them. In a series of lectures on the Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia, delivered at the Hebrew University in 1965, Scholem asserted that "objectively, there is no doubt there is a phenomenological proximity between the Kabbalistic meditative type and the meditative type amongst the Sufis and their Hindu sources."[51] Contemporary scholars emphasize the essential resemblance between Kabbalah and Sufism. According to Ronald Keiner "a point-by-point comparison of Sufism and Jewish Mysticism would uncover many similarities—structurally, conceptually, and phenomenologically."[52] Paul Fenton asserted that "even in the broad lines of their respective historical evolutions, Jewish and Islamic esotericism betray a remarkable resemblance."[53]

As the above citations indicate, the assumptions concerning the essential phenomenological resemblance between Kabbalah and Sufism are dependent on the identification of these traditions as Jewish and Islamic esotericism and mysticism. Before turning to examine the genealogies of the identification of Kabbalah and Sufism as mysticism, I will discuss the reception of the scholarly assumptions concerning the connections between Kabbalah and Sufism by the general public.

The Public Reception of Studies on Kabbalah and Sufism

The ideas concerning the close affinity and historical connections between Kabbalah and Sufism were received enthusiastically by contemporary neo-Kabbalists, Western Sufis, and the broader public.

The controversial American Sufi journalist and author and founder of the Center for Islamic Pluralism Stephen Sulyeman Schwartz wrote in an article titled "Islamic Sufism and Jewish Kabbalah: Shining a Light on their Hidden History," which is based on academic research, especially that of Moshe Idel, that: "Muslims and Jews further possess mystical customs—Islamic Sufism and Jewish Kabbalah—that are so close to one another that the presumption of mutual influence is inescapable."[54]

Tom Block, an artist, author, and activist from Minnesota, published in 2010 a book entitled *Shalom/Salaam*: *A Story of a Mystical Fraternity*, which is dedicated to the Sufi influence on the development of Jewish mysticism. Block acknowledges that he utilized the research of scholars Scholem, Keiner, Fenton, Idel, Hames, McGaha, and others, whose studies had "been sequestered in obscure journals or academic tomes."[55] Block asserts that "There has not been a scholar willing to make the claim that Sufism was a central influence in helping to shape Jewish spirituality, refashioning the religion as it is currently practiced."[56] In an article he published in *Sophia*, *A Journal of Traditional Studies*, Block concludes: "We are left with the surprising conclusion that the Kabbalah, that central aspect of Jewish spirituality from the medieval salons of the Holy Land and Spain down to prayer gatherings in twenty-first century Philadelphia, Los Angeles and the Middle East, is riffled through with Sufi undercurrents and teachings."[57]

The notion that Kabbalah and Sufism express similar—or identical—mystical teachings also became prevalent. According to an article on "Mystical Qabalah and the Mystical Tradition of Islam" published on the website of the neo-Kabbalistic group The Works of the Chariot: "The mystical worldview of Sufism, as delineated in the *Qur'an*, is basically identical to the qabalistic worldview rooted in the *Torah*."[58] Similarly, Doug Sandlin, the founder of the Living Unbound: Freedom beyond Imagination group, answered the question "What are the similarities and differences between Kabbalah wisdom and Sufism," posed on the Quora website, by

comparing Kabbalah and Sufism to "the standard model of physics with the labels in Hebrew, and the same model with labels in Arabic." Sandlin concludes his answer by asserting "Kabbalists and Sufis, like the experience-centric mystics in all traditions, understand how consciousness works, and have structured their philosophies and practices to facilitate direct experience of realized consciousness."[59]

The presumed shared mystical core of Kabbalah and Sufism and the historical connections between them are perceived as having a potential for interfaith dialog between Jews and Muslims, as well as for healing and solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Stephen Suleyman Schwartz suggests that the religious dialog between Sufis and Kabbalists, which he assumed existed in the past, provides a positive example for the present: "The religious consciousness shared in dialogue between the Muslim Sufis and the Jewish Kabbalists provides a positive example for the believers in each of the two religions today."[60] Tom Block asserts that peace in the Middle East can be achieved through the past and present mystical path shared by Jewish and Muslim adepts:

> While today's Jewish and Muslim politicians and warmongers incite hatred and desperately try to drive each other into the Mediterranean Sea, contemporary Muslim and Jewish masters practice a shared version of the mystical path, whether they know it or not. With the heart and souls of these two religions so closely linked through nearly a millennia [*sic*] of intermingling, should it not strike us as odd that the bodies of these two wonderful religions are at war? To imagine peace, we need only look into the dim and sometimes hidden past, to discover a story of mystical entanglement that reverberates still through the shared practice of Jewish and Muslim adepts.[61]

It should be noted that scholars of Sufism and Kabbalah who are active in the Jewish–Muslim Sufi order Derekh Avraham/Tariqat Ibrahim are also involved in interfaith and political dialog, and express their belief in the potential of the mystical way for achieving peace. Thus, for instance, Avraham Elqayam said in an interview for Yafia Katherine Randall's research on Sufism and Jewish–Muslim relations: "This is a love way and this is the basis for peace in the Middle East."[62]

Genealogies of Mysticism

The identification of Kabbalah and Sufism as Jewish and Islamic mysticism stands at the core of the research, public image, and practice of Sufism and Kabbalah in contemporary Western culture. As we have seen, this assumption underlies and stimulates the search for historical connections and phenomenological resemblance between Kabbalah and Sufism. In the last part of this article, I will offer a short discussion on the genealogies of the perception of Kabbalah and Sufism as mysticism. I will show that there are significant similarities, shared contexts, and interesting intersections in the history of the perception of both traditions as the mystical expressions of Judaism and Islam.

The origin of the term mysticism is the Greek adjective *mustikós*, stemming from the verb *múō*, whose meaning is to close, or shut (the eyes or mouth). The Church Fathers used the adjective "mystical" to describe commentaries revealing the allegorical Christological meaning in the Old Testament, and the secret of Christ's presence in the Eucharist. The term "mystical theology" first appeared in the fifth century in a Neoplatonic text attributed to Dionysus the Areopagite. It denoted contemplative prayer and other spiritual exercise directed at union with God.[63]

In the modern period, the term "mysticism" was gradually disconnected from its liturgical, hermeneutical, and Christological contexts. In the Enlightenment period, the term carried a negative meaning. It denoted religious excess and was applied primarily to Christian sectarians.[64] In the nineteenth century, a positive perception of mysticism emerged in the framework of idealist philosophy and the romantic and metaphysical movements. Mysticism at this period denoted a universal, essential component of religion, which is dependent on an intense direct experience of contact and union with a divine transcendent reality. The Quaker philosopher and theologian Rufus Jones articulated the modern perception of mysticism in his famous and influential definition:

> I shall use the word to express the type of religion which puts the emphasis on immediate awareness of relation with God, on direct an intimate consciousness of the Divine Presence. It is religion in its most acute, intense and living stage.[65]

Rufus Jones and other scholars who articulated similar definitions before and after him, regarded mysticism as a liberating, subversive, and vitalizing force within religion. The modern notion of mysticism became highly influential, and still regulates the way mysticism is perceived today. As we shall see, the definition of both Kabbalah and Sufism as mysticism became prevalent in the nineteenth century, and shaped the way in which they are studied, perceived, and practiced today.

The Mystical Dimension of Islam

The term "mystical theology" was first applied to Sufism in the late seventeenth century.[66] Barthélemy d'Herbelot de Molainville (1625–1695) *defined* Sufi mystical theology in his *Bibliothèque Orientale as* "the intimate union with the Divine in the heart of man detached from love for things of the earth, and transported beyond himself."[67] The definition of Sufism as mysticism, and the term Islamic (or "Mahomedan") mysticism, became prevalent in the nineteenth century, the period when the new, modern understanding of mysticism as a universal religious phenomenon of direct encounter and union with the divine reality became prevalent. In 1819, the British military scholar Lieutenant James William Graham published an article entitled "On Sufism or Mahomedan Mysticism." In the article, Graham suggested that mysticism or quietism is the best term to explain Sufism.[68] He claimed that Sufism disregards the practical worship and outwards forms of Islam in favor of mental or spiritual worship:

> In fine, it is that spiritual intercourse of the soul with its Maker that disregards and disclaims all ordinances and outward forms… which come under the head of practical worship (Jismani amul), being the deeds of the law, in contradistinction to mental or spiritual worship (Roohani amul).[69]

Graham compared Sufism's alleged disregard of practical worship to Paul's rejection of the deeds of the law in the epistle to the Romans ("Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law," Romans 3: 28).[70]

The German protestant theologian and missionary Friedrich August Tholuck also defined Sufism as mysticism and as theosophy in his *Sufismus, sive Theosophia Persarum Pantheistica* (Sufism, or the pantheistic theosophy of the Persians), published in 1821, and in *Blütensammlung aus der Morgenlandischen Mystik* (Collection from Oriental Mysticism), published

in 1825. Tholuck, who was influenced by Friedrich Schleiermacher's (1768–1834) idea that the essence of religion was feeling and intuition, regarded Sufism as the product of an inner-personal religious arousal. Tholuck compared Sufism to Christianity, and valorized the religious revitalization potential of Sufism, which was dependent on its Oriental nature. Nonetheless, because of its Islamic context, it could not develop its great potential, and "today it often acts as though powerless and ignoble, because it is on the wrong track. Oriental mysticism always remains as Quietismus and ineffective contemplation and is open to mystical pantheism."[71] As mentioned above, Tholuck was also interested in Kabbalah, and was the first to suggest the influence of Sufism on Kabbalah.

The British imperial agent and Orientalist Edward H. Palmer (1840–1882) repeated the identification of Sufism as Oriental Mysticism (as well as Theosophy) in his *Oriental Mysticism*: *A Treatise on Sufistic and Unitarian Theosophy of the Persians*, published in 1867.[72] Palmer, as well as other scholars in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, emphasized the Persian sources of Sufism. Adopting biological and antisemitic theories of race, scholars presented Sufism as an expression of Aryan mysticism and juxtaposed the mysticism of the Sufis to the rigidly theocratic and legalistic character of Semitic Islam.[73] Thus, for instance, the German theologian Otto Pfleiderer (1839–1908), in a lecture on Islam published in 1906, asserted that: "A peculiarity of Persian Islamism… is Sufism, a mystical-speculative tendency, some of which was deeply pious and given to flights of high thinking. Certain it is that this was not a genuine product of Arabian Islamism."[74] As Simon Sorgenfrei observed, during this period, "Sufism was understood as an expression of universal mysticism, or the spirituality of individual freethinkers, representing an alternative to or break with what was perceived as legalistic orthodox Islam."[75]

The categorization of Sufism as mysticism became prevalent in the twentieth century. It was accepted by theologians and scholars such as Rudolph Otto, Friedrich Heiler, William James, Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, Louis Massignon, Henry Corbin, and others.[76] The identification of Sufism as the Islamic expression of a universal mystical religious phenomenon shaped to a large degree the scholarship on Sufism, as well as its public image in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

As we have seen, the identification of Sufism as Islamic mysticism emerged in the early nineteenth century in the framework of Orientalist discourse and from a Christian theological perspective. Sufism was regarded as the mystical, spiritual (i.e., almost Christian) element of Islam,

which stood in opposition to, and subverted, the dogmatic, legalistic, and rigid aspects of Islam. As Khalil and Sheikh observed, concerning the position of Graham:

> Sufism was privileged in Graham's eyes precisely to the degree that it resembled the true spirit of Christianity. The theological argument which seemed to underlie his entire treatment and which he summarized in his conclusion was that Sufism stood in relation to Islam in a manner that was somewhat analogous to that of Christianity's relation to Judaism. In both cases, a superior religion of spirit and grace emerged out of and completed an inferior religion of law.[77]

A similar perception still governs Sufi scholarship, and the Western public image of Sufism. One of the leading twentieth-century scholars of Sufism, Annemarie Schimmel, wrote in her *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*:

> Sufism meant, in the formative period, mainly an interiorization of Islam, a personal experience of the central mystery of Islam, that of tauhid, "to declare that God is One." The Sufis always remained inside the fold of Islam, and their mystical attitude was not limited by their adherence to any of the legal or theological schools. They could reach their goal from any starting point—neither the differences between the legal madhhabs nor theological hairsplitting was, basically, of interest to them.[78]

The notion that Sufism is the esoteric, mystical aspect of Islam is expressed in a contemporary popular and influential introductory book on Islam, John L. Esposito's *Islam*: *The Straight Path*. In a section entitled "Sufism: The Mystic Path of Love," Esposito writes:

> Alongside the exterior path of law (Sharia) is the interior path or way (tariqa) of Sufi mysticism… while the Sharia provided the exoteric way of duties and rights to order the life of the individual and the community, Sufism offered an esoteric path or spiritual discipline, a method by which the Sufi sought not only to follow but to know God.[79]

Jewish Mysticism

The perception of Kabbalah as Jewish mysticism developed in a parallel trajectory and similar contexts to the identification of Sufism as Islamic mysticism (although there are also interesting differences, which I will not be able to discuss in this study).

The first descriptions of Kabbalah as mystical theology and mystical hermeneutics appeared in the second half of the seventeenth century. The term "Mystical Cabbala" appears in the title of Henry More's book from 1653.[80] The major text of Kabbalah, The Zohar, was described as "mystical and Kabbalistic commentary" (*comentarii Mystici & Cabbalistici*) in the Latin title page of the Zohar edition published in Sulzbach in 1684 in the circle of the Hebraist and Christian Kabbalist Knorr von Rosenroth (1636–1689). Kabbalah was described as "mystical theology" in the early eighteenth century, in the preface of Jacques Basnage (1653–1723) to *The History of the Jews from Jesus up to the Present*, which was first published in 1706,[81] and as "mystical metaphysics" and "occult philosophy" in Denis Diderot's (1713–1784) famous encyclopedia, published in 1752.[82]

In the early nineteenth century, some German theologians described Kabbalah as the Jewish manifestation of a universal mystical phenomenon. The Christian theologian and Freemason, Joseph Franz Molitor (1779–1860), who was affiliated with the German Romantic movement, regarded Kabbalah as a mystical tradition. He was the first to use the term "Jewish mysticism" in his book *Philosophie der Geschichte oder ueber die Tradition* (The Philosophy of History, or About Tradition) published in four volumes between the years 1827 and 1853.[83] The protestant theologian and jurist Johann Friedrich von Meyer (1772–1849) also identified the Kabbalah as "the mysticism of the Jews" in his introduction to the German translation of *Sefer Yetzira* (Book of Formation), published in Leipzig in 1830.[84]

The identification of Kabbalah as Jewish mysticism was adopted by German–Jewish scholars. Leopold Zunz (1794–1886), one of the founders of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Science of Judaism) movement, described Kabbalists as "mystics" in his *Die Gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden* (Lectures on Jewish Prayer).[85] Abraham Geiger (1810–1874), a scholar and leader of the Jewish reform movement, asserted that Kabbalah was the Jewish expression of mysticism.[86] The French Jewish scholar Adolph Franck (1810–1893) described Kabbalah as "mystical theology" and as a "mystical doctrine" in his influential study *La Kabbale*, *ou La*

Philosophie Religieuse des Hébreux (Kabbalah, or the Religious Philosophy of the Jews), published in 1844.[87] In 1853, Adolf Jellinek, the Jewish scholar and rabbi, published an anthology of Kabbalistic works entitled *Auswahl Kabbalisticher Mystik* (An Assortment of Kabbalistic Mysticism). Jellink accepted the modern notion of mysticism as an essential universal component of religion, and identified Kabbalah as the Jewish expression of this universal phenomenon:

> Mysticism is such an essential component in the spiritual development of mankind that it can be found in all nations and religions. Nevertheless, while many productive studies have been dedicated to Egyptian, Indian and Arabic mysticism, as well as early and late Christian Gnosticism, the historical development of the Kabbalah, from its basic foundations to its enormous ultimate structure, has not been awarded any comprehensive research.[88]

As mentioned above, Jellinek was the first Jewish scholar who wrote about Sufism and Kabbalah. He described Abraham Abulafia as a mystic enthusiast and a Jewish Sufi.

Christian and Jewish scholars in the nineteenth century identified Kabbalah as the esoteric, spiritual element of Judaism that subverts the legalism and materialism of exoteric Judaism. Similar to the Western perception of Sufism discussed above, Kabbalah was regarded as the mystical, spiritual essence of Judaism, which stood in opposition to the legalism of Talmudic Judaism.

This perception was first developed by Christian Kabbalists who believed that Kabbala was essentially compatible with Christian teachings. The notion that Kabbalah is the spiritual and mystical element of Judaism that challenges the dogmatism of the Talmud was expressed by Isaak Markus Jost (1793–1860) in his *Geschichte des Judenthums und Seiner Sekten* (The History of Judaism and its Sects), published in 1859. In the chapter dedicated to the "The Mystical Direction," the Jewish historian asserted that the main book of the Kabbalah, the *Zohar*, was opposed to the Talmud's occupation with the letter of the law. The *Zohar*, he wrote, "regards the search for the letter of the law an empty treatment of cold matter—which he calls death, the tomb of religion, against the vital teachings it strives for."[89] Jost's juxtaposition of the *Zohar*'s mystical vitality to the Talmud's deathly search for the letter of the law echoes the Pauline preference of the life-giving spirit to "the letter that killeth" (2nd Corinthians, 3:6). The perception of Kabbala as the vital, mystical element

of Judaism, which is opposed to the oppressive legalism of the Halacha (Jewish Talmudic law), is very similar to the juxtaposition of mystical Sufism to the materialistic and legalistic Sharia that was discussed above. The "mystification" of both Kabbalah and Sufism by nineteenth-century theologians and scholars reflects an attempt to construct these traditions as the spiritual, Christian (and especially Protestant Christian) compatible elements of Judaism and Islam. It is interesting to note that this perception was accepted and developed by Jewish, Western-acculturated scholars.

From the late nineteenth century, the term "Jewish mysticism" gradually becomes the common term for describing the Kabbalah and Hasidism (as well as a few other Jewish traditions, such as the Heichalot or Merkavah literature). In 1906, the Jewish scholar, philosopher, and Zionist activist Martin Buber (1878–1965) published an essay, entitled "Jewish Mysticism," as an introduction to his book, *Die Geschichten des Rabbi Nachman* (The Tales of Rabbi Nachman).[90] In the essay, Buber asserted that the inclination to mysticism was engrained in the Jewish people and claimed that the vitality and joy of Jewish mysticism (that reached its epitome in the early Hasidic movement) subverted the oppressive and austere legalism of Talmudic Judaism:

> The piety of this people was inclined from of old to mystical immediacy; it received the new message [of Hassidism] as an exalted expression of itself. The proclamation of joy in God, after a thousand years of a dominance of law that was poor in joy and hostile to it, acted like a liberation. In addition, the people up till then had acknowledged above them an aristocracy of Talmud scholars, alienated from life, yet never contested. Now the people, by a single blow, were liberated from this aristocracy and established in their own value.[91]

The identification of Kabbala and Hasidism as Jewish mysticism was accepted by Gershom Scholem, the founder of the modern school of academic research of Kabbalah. Scholem regarded the Kabbalah as the esoteric, mystical, and vital element of Judaism, that enabled the Jewish existence in the diaspora. When interviewed about his early interest in Kabbalah, Scholem answered: "I was interested in the question: did the Judaism of halakhah have sufficient strength to persist and to exist? Was halakhah really possible without a mystical basis? Does it have a vitality of its own to persist without degeneration over a period of thousands of years?"[92] The Pauline perception of Kabbalah as the spirit that gives life to the dead letter of Jewish legalism is still accepted by contemporary scholars

of Jewish mysticism. Thus, for instance, Melila Hellner-Eshed wrote in the introduction to her book about the language of mystical language in the *Zohar*: "The Zohar is a spiritually inspired work of the highest order… In the Zohar I find spiritual possibilities that are capable of redeeming aspects of the Jewish tradition—of which I am part—from fossilization."[93]

Conclusion

Scholars, as well as contemporary spiritual seekers, find much interest in the historical connections between Kabbalah and Sufism and assume that there is a remarkable resemblance between them. Paul Fenton, in the continuation to the passage I cited in the beginning of this article, asserted that the resemblance between Jewish and Islamic esotericism—that is, Kabbalah and Sufism—is embedded in their shared mystical tendencies which were tempered by the legalism and rationalism of Judaism and Islam:

> Even in the broad lines of their respective historical evolutions, Jewish and Islamic esotericism betray a remarkable resemblance. Both went through formative periods characterized by ecstatic experiences and followed by periods of consolidation in which mystical tendencies were tempered by legalism and philosophy.[94]

As we have seen, there were some historical connections between Kabbalah and Sufism through the generations, mostly, shared ideas that stem from the impact of Neoplatonic sources, as well as the impact of some Sufi-inspired writings on Kabbalah. In a few cases, Kabbalists encountered Sufi circles, and may have appropriated some Sufi practices. Possibly, more evidence of cultural transfers between Kabbalah and Sufism will be revealed in the future. However, the only evidence concerning direct acquaintance and connections between Jewish Kabbalists and Muslim Sufis are in the case of Abulafia's student in the early fifteenth century, Karo's visit in a *tekke* in the early sixteenth century, Sabbatai Zevi and his followers who converted to Islam in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and some twentieth-century and contemporary neo-Sufi and neo-kabbalistic groups.

I do not deny the historical importance of these cultural transfers, and the possibility that more historical connections between Kabbalah and Sufism will be revealed. Nonetheless, as we have seen, the scholarly and public interest in Kabbalah and Sufism depends not only on these

interesting but quite limited, historical connections. It is stimulated by the identification of both Kabbalah and Sufism as the esoteric, mystical tendencies of Judaism and Islam. As I have shown in this study, the interpretation of Kabbalah and Sufism as forms of a universal mystical phenomena emerged in a similar period, and similar contexts. From the nineteenth century to our day, Kabbalah and Sufism are perceived as the mystical, spiritual, and esoteric traditions that differ from and subvert the dogmatic and legalistic nature of Islam and Judaism. The perception of both traditions as mysticism shaped to a large extent the ways these traditions are studied and researched in the academia, as well as the ways they are perceived, appropriated, and practiced in contemporary Western societies. It also stimulated interest in the cultural transfers between Kabbalah and Sufism, speculations about possible historical encounters and visions of remarkable resemblances between them.

Notes

1. Paul B. Fenton, "Judaism and Sufism," In *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy,* ed. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 201.
2. Moshe Idel, "Jewish Mysticism and Muslim Mysticism," *Mahanayyim* 1 (1991): 29 [Hebrew]; Fenton, "Judaism and Sufism," 202. Sara Sviri, "Jewish–Muslim Mystical Encounters in the Middle Ages with Particular Attention to al-Andalus (Muslim Spain)," *Cambridge History of Judaism* 5–6 (2019) (forthcoming, draft published on https://www.academia.edu/35333184/Jewish_Muslim_Mystical_Encounters_in_the_Middle_Ages).
3. Mark Sedgwick, *Western Sufism*: *From the Abbasids to the New Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 56.
4. Idel, "Jewish Mysticism and Muslim Mysticism," 33.
5. Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1974), 36; Fenton, "Judaism and Sufism," 205.
6. Haviva Pedaya, *Vision and Speech*: *Models of Prophecy in Jewish Mysticism* (Los Angeles: *Cherub Press,* 2002), 171–200 [Hebrew]; Paul Fenton, "Solitary Meditation in Jewish and Islamic Mysticism in Light of Recent Archeological Discovery," *Medieval Encounters* 1, no. 2, (1995): 285; Moshe Idel, "Ecstatic Kabbalah and the land of Israel," in *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 93.

7. Moshe Idel, "R. Nathan Ben Saadiah Harar, the Author of Sharei Zedek," *Shalem* 7 (2002): 47–58 [Hebrew].
8. Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books), 147 (for the original Hebrew, see Idem, "Shaarei Zedek: A Kabbalistic Treaties from the school of R. Abraham Abulafia, attributed to R. Shem Tov (Ibn Gaon?)" *Qiryat Sefer* 1 (1924): 132–133.
9. Scholem, "Shaarei Zedek," 132.
10. Moshe Idel, "Hitbodedut as Concentration in Ecstatic Kabbalah," in *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 106; Fenton, "Solitary Meditation," 275–281.
11. Yoseph Karo, *Magid Mesharim* (Petah-Tikwah: Y. Bar-Levav, 1990), 279 [Hebrew]. See: R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 138.
12. *Werblowsky, Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic*, 139.
13. Geshom Scholem, *Researches in Sabbatianism* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1991), 116 (note 85), 354–355 [Hebrew]; Paul B. Fenton, "Shabbetay Zebî and His Muslim Contemporary Muhammad an-Niyâzî," in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, ed. David R. Blumenthal (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) vol. 3, 81–88.
14. Scholem, *Researches in Sabbatianism*, 328, 347, 353–355.
15. Sedgwick, *Western Sufism,* 159–160, 222–223, 225–228.
16. Paul B. Fenton, "Les Judéo-soufis de *Lausanne*: un point de rencontre dans la mouvance de Fritjhof Schuon," in *Réceptions de la cabale*, ed. Pierre Gisel and Lucie Kaennel (Paris: Editions de l'éclat, 2007), 283–313.
17. Yaakov Ariel, "From Neo-Hasidism to Outreach Yeshivot: The Origins of the Movements of Renewal and Return to Tradition," in *Kabbalah and Contemporary Spiritual Revival*, ed. Boaz Huss (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University Press, 2011), 24.
18. Chen Bram, "New Spirituality under the Shadow of the Conflict, Sufi Circles in Israel," Israel Studies Review 29, no. 2 (2014): 130–132; Yafia Katherine Randall, *Sufism and Jewish–Muslim Relations* (London: Routledge, 2016).
19. August Tholuck, *De Ortu Cabbalae* (Hamburg: Perthes, 1857).
20. Adolf Jellinek, *Beitrage Zur Geschichte der Kabbala* 2 (Leipzig: C. L. Fritzsche, 1852), 15.
21. J*ellinek*, "*Sufismus in der Kabbala*," *Orient* 12 (1851): 577–578. Reprinted in Jellinek, *Beitrage,* 45–47.
22. Adolf Jellinek, *Philosophie und Kabbala* (Leipzig: H. Hunger, 1854), vi, 44.
23. "… ein mysticher Schwärmer in wahren Sinne des Wortes, eine Jüdischer Ssufi." Jellinek, *Philosophie und Kabbala*, v.
24. Bension, Ariel. *The Zohar in Moslem and Christian Spain* (London: Routledge, 1932).

25. Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 6. See Also Gershom Scholem, "A Note on the Kabbalistical Treatise on Contemplation," in *Mélanges offerts à Henry Corbin,* ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Tehran: Institute of Islamic Studies, 1977), 665.
26. Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 36.
27. Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 36.
28. Scholem, "Shaarei Zedek," 132.
29. Scholem, "A Note on the Kabbalistical treaties," 666.
30. Scholem, *Researches in Sabbatianism*, 116 (note 85), 328, 347, 353–355.
31. Scholem, Kabbalah, 82.
32. Ronald Kiener wrote that "Scholem limits his history of Jewish mysticism in this period to the Christian world and largely ignores the development of a more Sufi-oriented Jewish mysticism in Andalusia and the rest of the Islamic world." Ronald Keiner, "Ibn al-Arabi and the Qabbalah: A Study of Thirteenth Century Iberian Mysticism," *Studies in Medieval Literature* 2, no. 2 (1982): 47–48, note 8b. Avraham Elqayam criticized Scholem for "orientalistically ignoring" the Sufi elements in Sabbatai Zevi's "mystical profile." Avraham Elqayam, "Sabbatai Zevi and Sufism," Donmeh Forum, posted June 29th 1999, http://www.kheper.net/topics/Kabbalah/Zevi_and_Sufism.html, accessed February 2019.
33. Paul Fenton, "Solitary Mediation," 293.
34. Moshe Idel, "Hitbodedut as Concentration," 103–69; Fenton, "Solitary Meditation," 281–287. Fenton, *Deux Traites des mystique juive* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1987), 96–102. Fenton, "Judaism and Sufism," 214.
35. Fenton, "Shabbetay Zebî and His Muslim Contemporary," 81–88.
36. Avraham Elqayam, "Sabbatai Sevi's Holy Zohar," *Kabbalah*: *Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 3 (1998): 367–368 [Hebrew]; Avraham Elqayam, "Sabbatai Zevi and Sufism."
37. Michael McGaha, "The Sefer ha-Bahir and Andalusian Mysticism," *Medieval Encounters* vol. 3, no. 1 (1997): 20–57.
38. Ronald Kiener, "Jewish Mysticism in the Lands of the Ishmaelites: A Re-Orientation," in *The Convergence of Judaism and Islam*: *Religious, Scientific, and Cultural Dimensions*, ed. Michael M. Laskier and Yaacov Lev (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 155; Sara Sviri, "Jewish—Muslim Mystical Encounters," 22–24. Sviri points out that McGaha's theory confuses between letter speculations which are prevalent in Sufi (as well as non-Sufi) Quran hermeneutics, and letter mysticism of the Shii-Ismaili tradition. Sviri concludes that the search for the chain, which links Jewish and Muslim mystical systems, points to Shii-Ismaili directions, rather than to Sufism.
39. Harvey J. Hames, "A Seal within a Seal: The imprint of Sufism in Abraham Abulafia," *Medieval Encounters* 12 no. 2 (2006): 153–172.

40. Keiner, "Ibn al-Arabi and the Qabbalah," 26–52.
41. Bar Asher, Avishai, *Journeys of the Soul*: *Concepts and Imageries of Paradise in Medieval Kabbala* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2019), 442–451 [Hebrew].
42. Bar Asher, *Journeys of the Soul*, 447–448.
43. Avraham Elqayam, "Nudity in Safed in the Sixteenth Century: Between Hasidism and Deviance," *Kabbalah* no. 30 (2013): 315–319 [Hebrew]. Elqayam bases his interpretation on the reference to a naked body part (*Ervah*), that Karo saw that day. Nonetheless, it is not clear that this occurred in the compound of the Sufi center. As mentioned above, Karo does not refer to people, or practices, he encountered during his walk in the *tekke*.
44. Jonathan Garb, *Yearnings of the Soul*: *Psychological Thought in Modern Kabbalah* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 25–26.
45. Paul Fenton, "Solitary Meditation," 271, 287; Paul Fenton, *Judaism and Sufism*, 214–215. Paul Fenton, "Sufi Influences on the Kabbalah in Safed," *Mahanayyim* 6 (1994): 172–179 [Hebrew]; Paul Fenton, "Influences soufies sur le développement de Qabbale à Safed: le cas de la visitation des tombeaux," in *Etudes sur les terres saintes et les pèlerinages dans les religions monotheist, ed. Daniel Tollet* (Paris: Champollion, 2012), 201–230.
46. Paul Fenton, "Solitary Meditation," 296.
47. Moshe Idel, "Jewish Mysticism and Muslim Mysticism," 33; Paul Fenton, "The Hierarchy of the Saints in Jewish and Islamic Mysticism," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabi Society* 10 (1991): 12–34.
48. Fenton, "Judaism and Sufism," 216.
49. Fenton, "Judaism and Sufism," 201.
50. Idel, "Jewish Mysticism and Muslim Mysticism," 33.
51. Geshom Scholem, *The Kabbalah of Sefer ha-Temuna and of Abraham Abulafia* (Jerusalem: Akademon, 1976), 164 [Hebrew]. See also Idem, *Kabbalah*, 180.
52. Keiner, "Ibn al-Arabi and the Qabbalah," 26.
53. Fenton, "Judaism and Sufism," 201.
54. Stephen Schwartz, "Islamic Sufism and Jewish Kabbalah: Shining a Light on their Hidden History," posted on Huffpost website 10.5.2011 https://www.huffingtonpost.com/stephen-schwartz/sufism-and-kabbalah_b_989875.html, accessed February 2019.
55. Thomas Block, *Shalom/Salaam*: *A Story of a Mystical Fraternity* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2010), vii.
56. Block, *Shalom/Salaam*.
57. Thomas Block, "The Question of Sufi Influence on the Early Kabbalah," *Sophia, The Journal of Traditional Studies* 13, 2 (Winter 2007–2008). Reprinted in Block's website, http://www.tomblock.com/shalom_sofia, accessed February 2019.

58. "Mystical Qabalah and the Mystical Tradition of Islam," Work of the Chariot website, http://www.workofthechariot.com/TextFiles/Back-Sufism.html, accessed February 2019.
59. "What are the similarities and differences between Kabbalah wisdom and Sufism?" Quora, https://www.quora.com/What-are-the-similarities-and-differences-between-Kabbalah-wisdom-and-Sufism, accessed February 2019.
60. Schwartz, "Islamic Sufism and Jewish Kabbalah."
61. Block, "The Question of Sufi Influence on the Early Kabbalah."
62. Randall, *Sufism and Jewish–Muslim Relations*, 6.
63. Louis Bouyer, "Mysticism: An Essay on the History of the Word," in *Understanding Mysticism,* ed. Richard Woods (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 42–55.
64. Michel de Certeau, "Mysticism," *Diacritics* 22 (1992): 11–25. Eric Leigh Schmidt, "The Making of Modern Mysticism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71 (2003): 273–302.
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CHAPTER 12

Heretical Orthodoxy: Eastern and Western Esotericism in Thomas Moore Johnson's "Platonism"

Vadim Putzu

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the late nineteenth-century American intellectual Thomas Moore Johnson's (1851–1919) interest in and peculiar construction of esoteric wisdom—with a special attention to its Kabbalistic expressions—as they are reflected in the collection of books he amassed and read, in his work as editor of the journal *The Platonist*, and in the activities he engaged in as part of his involvement with occultist groups, such as the Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor. Undergirding these three pursuits was Johnson's zeal in corresponding with a wide variety of intellectuals, whose theories he contributed to transfer across three continents. This situation placed a man living in a tiny Midwestern town right at the center of a network of ideas and activities that characterized the blossoming of the Anglo-American interest in esotericism and the occult in the 1870s–1880s. Although often described as an unoriginal thinker, in his idiosyncratic understanding of

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secret religious wisdom as well as in his enduring allegiance to certain people and practices, Johnson reveals his intellectual independence—his "heretical orthodoxy"—as a Theosophical Society and Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor affiliate in a time when these groups are parting ways over which esotericism—Eastern or Western—deserves to be followed.

The Sage of the Osage

Known as "The Sage of the Osage" (river), since well before his old age, Johnson was a lawyer by trade and a Platonist at heart.[1] One of four sons of a US senator whose family had migrated to Missouri from Virginia in the early 1840s, he studied at the University of Notre Dame, from which he graduated in 1871. Having passed the bar in 1872, he served as prosecuting attorney for two terms, but maintained a legal practice in Osceola only for the sake of earning enough money to acquire philosophy books. Interested in civil progress and societal advancement, Johnson served as his town's mayor as well as the president of its board of education for many years, trying, among other things, to incentivize the study of Latin in public schools. However, Johnson was neither a socialite nor a globetrotter. Aside from his family's various forced relocations during Johnson's childhood because of the Civil War, and his college years in South Bend, Indiana, he was never away from Osceola for extended periods of time of his own will. While between 1876 and 1879 he worked in Texas for a while and visited some cities in Missouri, Illinois, and Massachusetts, later in life Johnson only left his hometown for short scholarly trips or for health reasons. Johnson's contact with the outside world was thus very limited, and occurred mainly through the medium of reading and epistolary correspondence.

In light of this situation, along with his publications, Johnson's library and his collection of missives represent two extremely important sources for the reconstruction of his thought and intellectual interests, difficult as they are to be comprehensively evaluated.[2] His extant letter exchanges in particular reveal a rich tapestry of connections that Johnson maintained with a variety of better and lesser known literati of his times, from university professors of philosophy and classics such as Jacob Cooper, Basil Gildersleeve, William Goodwin, George Howison, Arthur Lovejoy, Charles Norton, and Frank Thilly to fellow scholars of Neoplatonism and modern idealism such as Henry Brokmeyer and Thomas Davidson.

Prominent men of letters, such as author Henry James Sr. as well as important political figures such as Missouri governor Joseph Folk, US senator George Hoar, and US ambassador Andrew Dickson White were also among Johnson's correspondents. In addition, as can be expected from someone heavily involved with esoteric groups, Johnson exchanged letters with Theosophical Society leaders, such as William Judge and Elliott Page, but also with self-proclaimed spiritualists tied to other occult organizations such as Freeman Dowd, Richard Goodwin, and James Keifer. What is perhaps most impressive, given Johnson's insular location, is the international reach of his correspondence, which includes not only communications with politicians, scholars, and esotericists based in the United Kingdom—the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury Anthony Ashley-Cooper, Oxford professors Ingram Bywater and Fred Conybeare, Scottish philosophers Kenneth Guthrie and James Stirling, and important English affiliates of the Theosophical Society (and other occultist groups) such as Thomas Docking, Anna Kingsford, Kenneth Mackenzie, William Oxley, and John Yarker—but also missives from Vatican archivist and Jesuit cardinal Franz Ehrle in Rome, from the French governor of Tunisia René Millet, and from other intellectuals in Greece, Hungary, India, Italy, and Palestine.

It should be noted that Johnson's hometown of Osceola provided both a degree of isolation, which he simultaneously lamented and profited from, and relative proximity to the budding Midwestern philosophical communities of Missouri and Illinois. Osceola has long been a town of few hundreds, sitting on the banks of the river Osage in southwest Missouri.[3] While far away from the intellectual centers of the East Coast, this town's location allowed Johnson to maintain close contact with both the St. Louis Philosophical Society, led by William Harris and devoted mainly to Hegel,[4] and the Plato Clubs of Jacksonville and Quincy, in Illinois.[5] These were philosophical circles dedicated to adult group education for the intellectual and moral improvement of individuals and society, and Johnson even started a "philosophico-literary club" in Osceola on their model in the late 1870s, with schoolteachers and other professionals. However, after having attracted close to twenty members for a few years, Johnson dismantled the club, preferring solitary philosophical study to time-wasting dialogue with unprepared discussants.[6] Indeed, despite his protests to the contrary,[7] the small-town, secluded life of his hometown allowed Johnson both to leisurely devote most of his time to his studies and to develop his ideas in a fairly independent fashion, without pressing social influences.[8]

A Midwestern Platonist

Johnson's self-professed allegiance to Platonism can hardly be questioned. If his readings and writings were not revealing enough, one could find further hints at Johnson's philosophical loyalties in the names he chose for his three sons[9]—Ralph Proclus, Waldo Plato, and Franklin Plotinus—or elsewhere in the epitaph carved on his tombstone: "Here lies not Thomas M. Johnson but the body used by him. He came Mar. 30, 1851. He departed Mar. 2, 1919." Indeed, Johnson's stature as a scholar and apostle of Platonism has been duly noted in previous studies, which have especially underscored his contribution to the diffusion of Neoplatonic texts and ideas in the late nineteenth-century Anglophone world.[10] However, Johnson's particular understanding of Platonic philosophy needs to be clarified here.

Johnson's first encounter with philosophy occurred in 1870, when in the stacks of Notre Dame's library he picked up a copy of the *Chaldean Oracles*, a second-century syncretistic work of uncertain attribution regarded as sacred by later Neoplatonists.[11] As the text's translator and editor Thomas Taylor (1758–1835) argued that the Babylonian/Persian teachings contained therein were essentially identical with Platonism, Johnson became convinced that the Neoplatonists had access to all of Plato's oral teachings as well to the writings of his immediate followers, and were therefore ultimately true Platonists. Accordingly, in his notebook he claimed that "Plato cannot be read or studied, comprehendingly, without the aid of Proclus, Plotinus, and the other Neoplatonic philosophers."[12]

Johnson was not alone in this persuasion. Insofar as Taylor's translations of Plato and the Neoplatonists were the most readily available to the English-speaking public of the time, his mystical, syncretistic interpretation of Platonism was widespread among late nineteenth-century American intellectuals, influencing New England Transcendentalists like Bronson Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau as well as St. Louis Hegelians like Harris and Frank Sanborn.[13]

Acting upon his conviction, Johnson began to collect and study all the writings authored by Plato and his Neoplatonic commentators he could find, and proceeded to translate from the Greek a number of them, such as Plotinus' *Enneads*, Iamblichus' *Exhortation to Philosophy*, and Proclus' *Elements of Theology*. In addition, he authored a few "Platonic" studies of his own, including one about Hermias' demonstration of the immortality

of the soul entitled *Opuscula Platonica: The Three Fundamental Ideas of the Human Mind*, and an unfinished biography of Thomas Taylor.

Most of Johnson's studies and translations of Neoplatonic texts—some of which were appearing in English for the first time—were printed, along with reprints of Taylor's works, in the journals he edited and published.[14] Johnson was in fact responsible for two out of the three journals devoted to Platonism that were published in the United States in the late nineteenth century: *The Platonist*, which appeared from 1881 to 1888 and attracted the interest of subscribers from as far as India and Europe, and *Bibliotheca Platonica*, which lasted until 1890.[15]

The main attraction of Platonic philosophy for Johnson undoubtedly lay in its doctrine of the soul's immortality and purification. As he defined it in the opening statement of *The Platonist*, Platonism is "a philosophy totally subversive of sensualism, [and] materialism," which "recognizes the essential immortality and divinity of the human soul, and posits its highest happiness as an approximation to, and union with, the Absolute One."[16] In this perspective, Johnson viewed Platonism as a form of mystical idealism with religious overtones, being the philosophy which in Proclus' words "came to mankind for the benefit of terrestrial souls, in lieu of statues, temples, and the whole of sacred institutions."[17] Essentially a substitute for religion, Platonic philosophy thus understood is "the leader of intellectual salvation"[18] insofar as its ideas are "primarily in the noumenal world, and our apprehension and participation of them here, in the region of time and space, is a foretaste of a perfect participation thereafter."[19]

Because of its goals and promises, Platonic thought had a unique status in Johnson's estimation. According to him, in fact, "Platonism in its essence is Universal Philosophy."[20] By this, the Sage of the Osage meant that in Plato's thought various truthful ideas manifested in different ancient religious traditions around the world found their correct formulation, and that the Neoplatonic interpreters of this philosophy made the true meaning of these principles known for all ages. (Neo)Platonism, in this sense, was to Johnson an authoritative body of truth, "immortal because its principles are immortal in the Human Intellect and Heart."[21] In other words, he conceived of Platonism as perennial philosophy, in fundamental agreement with the Renaissance notion of *prisca theologia*. In this spirit, like Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) and Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), Johnson developed a syncretistic attitude, maintaining that a single, united truth best understood as (Neo)Platonism had been

variously recognized in the esoteric teachings of different religions.[22] As a result, he became interested in a variety of religious systems, inasmuch as their doctrines largely corresponded, in his view, to the truth of Platonic philosophy. It is Johnson's unwavering allegiance to what he conceived as true Platonism, consistently paired with a lifelong engagement with the beliefs and practices of multiple esoteric religions that constitute—to borrow an expression he used—his "heretical orthodoxy."[23] This particular mindset sparked Johnson's curiosity for religions other than the dominant Christianity of his Midwestern environment, such as Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism.[24] As will be seen, however, just as he had little respect for what he viewed as the average Christian, the Sage of the Osage had little interest in these other religions per se or in their mainstream forms. Instead, he devoted his attention only to the mystical and supposedly esoteric currents within these religious traditions, such as Kabbalah and Sufism, insofar as he recognized in these traditions (Neo)Platonic notions and goals more or less adequately presented.

To the extent that he viewed it as perennial wisdom, harmonically synthesizing values and conceptions hidden in various religious traditions, Johnson's Platonism can be regarded as an expression of "Western esotericism," in a religionist perspective.[25] Seen from this standpoint, the—initially puzzling to some—involvement of a student and translator of classic philosophy like Johnson with the Theosophical Society and other esoteric organizations since the 1880s should become unsurprising, given their shared syncretic, anti-materialistic outlook, and considering that many Theosophists were greatly interested in Neoplatonism at the time.[26]

A Collector of Esoteric Books

From his first acquisitions at age 19, Johnson built a collection of books that would rival most US libraries at the time. Through contacts with both American and European booksellers, Johnson amassed a library of more than 8000 volumes written in a variety of languages. By 1898 his library had grown so much that it merited its own "book house," a four-room building that became Johnson's private little world, in which he would spend most of his days reading, translating, editing, and attending to his correspondence.

Much of Johnson's collection reflects his interest in Greek philosophy, as it contains close to 1000 volumes by or about Plato along with a wealth of primary and secondary sources related to Neoplatonism. While classic

philosophy is extremely well represented in his library, Johnson had little interest in the scientific and empirical philosophical writings of the modern period, preferring to them Spinoza and later idealists such as Berkeley and Hegel.

On the other hand, Johnson's collection also comprises hundreds of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century publications, many of which would be included in what contemporary scholars call the "referential corpus" of Western esotericism. Johnson was in fact an eager purchaser of works dealing with esoterica, who by the early 1870s had already read Ficino, Pico, Reuchlin, and Henry More. In due course, Johnson succeeded in securing an impressive number of early printed books about esotericism, astrology, and magic, such as the 1557 edition of Pico della Mirandola's *Opera Omnia*, Francesco Patrizi's 1593 *Magia Philosophica*, a 1620 copy of Tommaso Campanella's *De sensu rerum et magia*, the 1650 English translation of Jacques Gaffarel's *Unheard of Curiosities*, the 1663 edition of Caesar Longinus' *Trinum Magicum*, a 1665 reprint of Kenelm Digby's *Two Treatises: Of Bodies and of Man's Soul*, Thomas Tryon's 1697 *The Way to Health*, and a 1704 edition of Robert Fludd's *Fasciculus Geomanticus*. Among these ancient and precious volumes, two of the oldest were authored by Marsilio Ficino—namely his 1489 *De vita libri tres*, and the first edition of Ficino's 1492 Latin translation of Plotinus' works.

One branch of esoterica that is especially well represented in Johnson's library is Kabbalah. As I have shown elsewhere,[27] the Sage of the Osage owned copies of almost all the classic works of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Christian Kabbalah, as well as many other books that were highly influential in the development of occultist Kabbalah in the nineteenth century. This collection consists of, among other volumes, Francesco Giorgio/Zorzi's 1525 *De Harmonia Mundi*, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa's 1533 *De occulta philosophia*, various works by Guillaume Postel, including his 1564 *De Orbis Terrae Concordia*, John Dee's 1564 *Monas Hieroglyphica*, Johannes Pistorius's 1587 compendium *Artis Cabalisticae*, the works of Johannes Trithemius, including his 1608 *Steganographia*, a 1612 edition of Pietro Galatino's *De Arcanis Catholicae Veritatis*, Pierre Morestel's 1621 *Artis Kabbalisticae*, Jacques Gaffarel's 1625 *Abdita Divinae Cabalae Mysteria*, a 1651 edition of Jacob Boehme's *Signatura Rerum*, a 1679 edition of Henry More's philosophical writings (which includes his *Conjectura Cabalistica*), and the English translations of Francis van Helmont's *The Paradoxical Discourses* (1685) and *Seder Olam* (1694).

Whereas Johnson's Kabbalistic holdings also included the works of Thomas Burnet as well as nineteenth-century editions and English translations of the writings of Paracelsus and Giordano Bruno, his collection of books specifically engaging Jewish Kabbalah is limited to contemporary digests and anthologies of primary sources in translation. It is noteworthy that, while three of them, namely Moritz Freystadt's *Philosophia cabbalistica et Pantheismus*, Adolph Jellinek's *Auswahl Kabbalistischer Mystik*, and Christian David Ginsburg's *The Kabbalah: Its Doctrines, Development, and Literature*, are scholarly compilations penned by Jewish authors,[28] other works, such as Johann von Meyer's translation of the *Sefer Yezirah*, Eliphas Lévi's writings,[29] and Samuel Mathers' *The Kabbalah Unveiled*, were compiled by non-Jewish writers with occultist leanings. What is more, even chiefly scholarly works in Johnson's Kabbalistic collection, like Gottfried Selig's translation of the *Sefer Shimmush Tehillim* and Isaac Myer's *Qabbalah*, were being eagerly appropriated by late nineteenth-century European and American occultists.

When one also considers that in Johnson's vast book collection there is hardly any title concerning Jewish history, religion, or culture, it seems fair to conclude from a perusal of his library holdings that, while the Sage of the Osage had no interest in Judaism per se, he was undoubtedly fascinated by Kabbalah. However, as will become clearer from his publications on this topic in *The Platonist*, Johnson's attraction for Kabbalistic lore was mediated by its interpretation offered by nineteenth-century occultists, especially Eliphas Lévi.[30] Presenting it as a form of universal wisdom, authors like Lévi viewed Kabbalah not so much as an inherently Jewish secret tradition but rather as an integral element of Western esotericism. While such an understanding of Kabbalah had been common in esoteric circles for centuries, Johnson's library holdings bespeak two personal idiosyncrasies in his conception of this tradition: firstly, his conviction about Kabbalah's fundamental ties with Neoplatonism, which is evidenced by the near-exclusive focus of his collection on scholarly works that emphasize these ties and on Kabbalistic authors with Neoplatonic leanings;[31] secondly, Johnson's belief in Kabbalah's eminently performative nature, featuring divination and magical practices. In this perspective, the promised results of Kabbalistic praxis led him, in my opinion, to commit to Lévi's practice-oriented understanding of Kabbalah over, for instance, Seth Pancoast's more speculative—and popular among Theosophical Society members—interpretation of this lore.[32]

An Editor of Esoterica

Johnson's personal interest in and distinctive understanding of religious esotericism is apparent also in his editorial work. Along with fellow Theosophical Society member and Neoplatonic enthusiast Alexander Wilder, between 1881 and 1888 Johnson edited and published the journal *The Platonist*. Despite being issued irregularly, this periodical reached hundreds of readers in the United States, Europe, and India.[33] While "devoted chiefly to the dissemination of the Platonic Philosophy in all its phases,"[34] already in its second volume *The Platonist* began to include articles on Kabbalah, the Tarots, Gnosticism, Sufism, and yoga, out of Johnson's conviction that ultimately "the Esoteric doctrine of all religions and philosophies is identical."[35] As *The Platonist*'s main editor, Johnson was also its major contributor and decided what was going to be published. In addition, he solicited essays from various other authors, without shying away from annotating articles whose arguments he disagreed with before including them in his journal. As a result, *The Platonist* reflects Johnson's personal convictions about various forms of religious and philosophical esotericism.

In matters of Kabbalah, Johnson's embrace of Lévi's presentation of this lore is testified to by the publication in volume II of *The Platonist* of portions of the French occultist's *Science des Esprits*[36] and *La clef des grands mystères*[37]—texts which the Sage of the Osage deemed important enough to have translated into English by fellow Theosophists. In addition, although he never succeeded, Johnson also planned to publish in his journal English translations of two kabbalistic works pronounced essential by Lévi and other nineteenth-century occultists, *Sefer Yezirah*[38] and *Kabbala Denudata*.[39] What is more, among his rare journal articles unrelated to Platonic and Neoplatonic themes, Johnson penned one on Kabbalah, largely and explicitly compiled after Lévi,[40] and one about the Tarots—a subject whose inherent connection with Kabbalah was established, once again, by Lévi.[41]

In light of the above, it is unsurprising that the only other article specifically devoted to Kabbalah to ever appear on *The Platonist* also portrayed it in occultist terms, at least in part after Lévi. In volume III of his journal, Johnson published in fact an essay by Thomas Burgoyne,[42] which presents Kabbalah as an ancient philosophy and as a universal science of secret correspondences that enables divination through Tarot cards.[43] Accordingly, in subsequent issues of *The Platonist*, Johnson also published

a multi-part essay on the Tarot, which Burgoyne wrote drawing heavily from Lévi and his student—and fellow French occultist—Paul Christian.[44] By including in his journal, out of the many articles Burgoyne wrote on esoterica,[45] only these two, Johnson ensured that his peculiar (although derived from Lévi) performative perspective on Kabbalah as the philosophical foundation for Tarot occult practice is the sole view on this topic that readers of *The Platonist* would be exposed to.

Within the pages of *The Platonist*, Johnson's other idiosyncrasy in conceiving of Kabbalah—namely, his interested underscoring of this tradition's ties with Neoplatonism, particularly in matters regarding psychology—emerges not only in his essay on the topic, in which he emends certain details of the Kabbalistic doctrine of the soul along Neoplatonic lines.[46] Johnson's personal predilections in this area are also reflected in his choice to publish in his journal Isaac Myer's translation of Synesius' *On Dreams*, whose annotations highlight the similarities between the Alexandrian Neoplatonist's conception of multiple divisions in the human spirit and the Kabbalistic doctrine of a tripartite soul.[47] A syncretist, not unlike Johnson and Burgoyne, Myer further claims that this notion of the soul originated among the ancient Chaldeans, and has parallels in other ancient esoteric religious traditions. Ultimately, as both his correspondence with Johnson and his influential book *Qabbalah* attest, for Myer both Neoplatonism and Kabbalah were parts of the same ancient universal wisdom rooted in the Asian continent.[48]

While favoring a presentation of Kabbalah in universalistic terms, Johnson included in his journal also essays about other forms of purported esotericism that were specifically Jewish yet intimately connected with Platonic idealism. This is the case with "Hebrew and Christian Occultism,"[49] an article penned by Johnson's co-editor and syncretist Alexander Wilder.[50] In this essay, Wilder argues for the existence of an ancient esoteric tradition among the Israelites, which developed especially after the Babylonian exile and is epitomized in a work of occult wisdom he attributes to Platonist-leaning Second Temple Jews: the *Zohar*.[51] Similarly, in the only two articles written for *The Platonist* by a rabbi, Emanuel Schreiber[52] presents Spinoza's monism as an esoteric understanding of traditional Jewish beliefs in God and the immortality of the soul, on the one hand;[53] on the other hand, he describes the Gnostics as theosophists who originated from Platonizing Jews and whose secret wisdom consisted of a doctrine of multiple divine emanations.[54]

Just as the esoteric Judaism Johnson chose to showcase in *The Platonist* reflects his interests in Neoplatonic theology and psychology, so too does his presentation of esoteric Islam. Beginning in 1881,[55] Johnson published in his journal parts of an English translation of Ibn Tufayl's (c. 1105–1185) *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, a medieval Sufi-inspired text which appears to have attracted him because it supposedly expounds the Platonic doctrine of intuition. In the same year, he also included in *The Platonist* Wilder's translated excerpts of Ibn Badja's (c. 1085–1139) philosophy, which deal specifically with his largely Neoplatonic theory of the soul.[56] Initially drawn to Islamic esotericism out of his interest in medieval Neoplatonic philosophy,[57] Johnson was soon driven to publish in *The Platonist* a sizable amount of Islamic mystical materials, particularly concerning Sufism. In 1886, contact with Mirza Mohamed Hadi Ruswa (1857–1931), an Indian Muslim scholar of Platonism, resulted in the publication on Johnson's journal of the former's partial translation of the *Desatir*, a Persian mystical text on metempsychosis heavily influenced by Neoplatonic thought.[58] Around the same time, having become convinced that Sufism had long predated Islam, insofar as it originated in Platonism,[59] the Sage of the Osage also published "an interesting letter," in which Ruswa briefly outlines the basics of Sufism for the readers of *The Platonist*.[60] Johnson's encounter in the same year with one of the first scholars of Sufism on US soil, Carl Henrik Andreas Bjerregaard (1845–1922), led to an even more sustained engagement with this form of Islamic esotericism. In this case, not only did Johnson publish in *The Platonist* some articles authored by Bjerregaard;[61] in early 1887 he also attempted to establish a Sufi chapter within the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor,[62] whose formation he announced "with special pleasure" from the pages of his journal.[63] However, despite the increasing interest for "Oriental thought" among both Theosophical Society and Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor members—such as Johnson and Bjerregaard—at the time,[64] the former's proposal to establish a Sufi circle of "thoroughly practical character" met with the opposition of fellow brothers.[65] Nonetheless, Johnson's dedication to Sufism outlived his allegiance to the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, as by the late 1890s he had become affiliated (along with Bjerregaard) with the Order of Sufis, a group that focused on the "Theosophy of the Persians."[66] Johnson's ongoing commitment to Sufism, which he understood as a practically oriented form of Neoplatonic esotericism, thus testifies to his intellectual independence—his heretical orthodoxy—within and across esoteric circles.

An Occultist: Tarot, Yoga, Sex, Magic

Earlier studies on Johnson tend to depict him almost exclusively under the guise of Platonic philosophy. By so doing, these studies implicitly evoke the image of a devotee to abstract speculation, whose sole interests were rarefied ideas and a disembodied, heavenly, and solely intellectual existence.[67] In this perspective, Johnson's leadership role in esoteric groups, and especially his involvement in the activities of an order of practical occultism like the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, has often appeared rather puzzling to these scholars.[68] As a result, they suggest that his affiliation with such circles was mostly a matter of expediency, a strategic effort to disseminate through his publications the Platonic gospel to a potentially captive audience.[69]

However, as suggested above, Johnson's Platonism can be best understood as an expression of Western esotericism, claiming to a perennial secret wisdom, which involves practices for spiritual elevation, about the universal inner dimension of reality.[70] In this perspective, groups like the Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor were a good ideological fit for Johnson's interests, insofar as their teachings displayed various doctrinal affinities with his permutation of Platonism.[71]

That Johnson had a genuine interest, and not just a utilitarian and thus fleeting one, in the ideas and practices of contemporary esoteric circles is also demonstrated by the fact that he kept in contact with Theosophical Society and Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor members,[72] and continued to read their publications,[73] well after he had ceased to publish his journals and was no longer officially involved in these organizations.

More crucially, through his involvement with the Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, Johnson encountered a number of practices then perceived as occult, such as astral magic, yoga, and the Tarot, which continued to attract him deeply long after they went out of fashion in these esoteric groups. For example, Johnson's early exchanges with Theosophical Society members around 1881 introduced him to Lévi's ideas,[74] which, as previously mentioned, included an understanding of the Tarot as a Kabbalistic tool for divination. Over the next few years, he went to great lengths to acquire Tarot cards,[75] and to read and publish about this topic, despite the fact that by that time, the Theosophical Society leadership had moved away from Lévi's practical occultism.[76] Because of this shift, like other Theosophists, Johnson was drawn to the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, in pursuit of occult practices that had

initially been popularized but then abandoned by the Theosophical Society. In addition to the Tarot, these included astral travel—the ability to project one's soul and to commune with other spiritual beings thereby, obtaining esoteric knowledge—which could be developed by using magic mirrors, through the practice of yoga, and possibly with the assistance of a special sexual praxis.[77] As an Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor member, not only did Johnson repeatedly try to obtain multiple magic mirrors.[78] What is more, while in 1886 even the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor abandoned yoga, at least officially, as part of an effort to signal its Western identity *vis à vis* the "Oriental" Theosophical Society,[79] the Sage of the Osage continued to be interested in this practice for at least another twenty years, long after he had severed all ties with the Brotherhood to follow Sufism.[80]

In my opinion, Johnson's longstanding interest in certain occult practices irrespective of his organizational affiliations can be explained in part by his personal dispositions.[81] To a person who found it difficult to meet kindred spirits and who was concerned about his own future (as well as that of the world he was living in), the Tarot presented a tool to assess a person's character and to divine upcoming events. Similarly, to someone preoccupied with the intellectual and spiritual progress of mankind, sex magic promised an opportunity to contribute to such advancement by generating supposedly gifted children.[82] Additionally, to a man who dreaded travel and had little interest in everyday social relations, astral magic offered the means to encounter other worthwhile souls without physically leaving his beloved Osceola library.

More decisively, however, in terms of goals and (to some extent) methods, Johnson must have perceived occult practices like astral magic, yoga, and Lévi's Kabbalah as analogous to Neoplatonic theurgy.[83] In this perspective, his allegiance to a form of Platonism that viewed theurgical praxis as its most consequential activity[84] may once again illuminate both Johnson's involvement with certain practices and the esoteric circles that promoted them, and the independence and peculiarity of his stance.

An Orthodox Heretic

In the clash between Blavatsky's secret Oriental wisdom and Burgoyne's Occidental occultism,[85] Johnson retained a somewhat distinctive position. In its sustained engagement with Indian yoga, Sufism, and Lévi's Kabbalah, his syncretic esotericism is both Eastern and Western. Johnson's Platonism

represents a fascinating case of negotiation between orientalizing and westernizing tendencies in late nineteenth-century Anglo-American esoteric culture, with a view to the emergence of a new unified religion, beyond racial and creedal barriers, at one with science yet anti-materialistic and respectful of older ideas.[86]

According to Anderson, Johnson's view of Platonic philosophy as an authoritative body of perennial truth made him an unoriginal thinker, whose sole mission was to make such salvific truth available to the new generations through translation, interpretation, commentary, and possibly education.[87] As I have argued, however, it is this absolutist attitude toward Platonism that determined Johnson's lifelong interest in and unconventional understanding of esoteric ideas and practices extant in multiple religious traditions. As a result, Johnson's Platonism can be viewed as an esoteric construction, made possible by the transfer of both Eastern and Western forms of secret wisdom to the United States in the 1870s–1880s, which he idiosyncratically interpreted and incorporated into his ultimate philosophy.

Notes

1. For a full biography of Thomas Moore Johnson, see Paul Anderson, *Platonism in the Midwest* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 153–154. See also Patrick D. Bowen, "Magicians, Muslims, and Metaphysicians: The American Esoteric Avant-Garde in Missouri, 1880–1889," *Theosophical History* 17 (2014): 49–51.
2. Although in 1999 a foundation was established for the preservation, promotion, and study of Thomas Moore Johnson and his descendants' work, their collection of writings, and other rare objects, a single complete catalogue of the Johnson Library and Museum holdings is currently still unavailable. Most of Johnson's philosophy books were donated to the University of Missouri library in 1947, while part of his materials is currently kept at the Special Collections and Archives section of Missouri State University's Meyer Library. As for Johnson's correspondence, while the collection of extant letters has been fully catalogued, and a significant portion of it has recently been published—see Patrick D. Bowen and K. Paul Johnson, eds., *Letters to the Sage: Selected Correspondence of Thomas Moore Johnson* (Forest Grove: The Typhon Press, vol. 1 2016, vol. 2 2018)—it should be noted that, except for four missives Johnson himself penned, such collection only comprises letters that other individuals sent to him.

3. On the town of Osceola in the nineteenth century and beyond, see Anderson, *Platonism in the Midwest*, 151–152.
4. On this institution, see Anderson, *Platonism in the Midwest*, 2–6, and the bibliography listed there.
5. On these clubs see Anderson, *Platonism in the Midwest*, 6–7. Other short-lived Plato Clubs existed in Decatur and Bloomington, Illinois. The main animating force behind the Plato Clubs and other similarly oriented US philosophical societies in the 1860s–1890s was Hiram Jones, with whom Johnson corresponded for over two decades. For Jones and his activities, see Anderson, *Platonism in the Midwest*, chs. II and III; Jay Bregman, "The Neoplatonic Revival in North America," *Hermathena* 149 (1990): 113.
6. For this unsuccessful experiment, see Anderson, *Platonism in the Midwest*, 163.
7. For Johnson's complaints about his situation, see Anderson, *Platonism in the Midwest*, 157; Natalie Whitaker, "Owner of a Lonely Heart: Reading the Occult in Nineteenth Century Missouri" (paper presented at the Craft Critique Culture Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference: Bridging Divides, Iowa City, IA, April 2016), 3–4; 7–8; 20.
8. On this point, see also Bowen, "Magicians," 48–49.
9. While the first names Ralph and Waldo might be taken as an homage to R. W. Emerson, whom Johnson, as we shall see, indeed admired, it is much more likely that Waldo P. was actually named after his paternal grandfather, Sen. Waldo Porter Johnson. Similarly, Franklin P. may have been named after his maternal uncle Robert Franklin Barr (see *Journal of the Johnson Library and Museum* 4 (2010): 72–79). Johnson also had a daughter, Helen, who was one of the first women in the United States to earn a doctorate in Classics and Sanskrit (she received her PhD from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in 1912) and became a respected scholar of Jainism. See John Cort, "Helen M. Johnson: The First American Woman Scholar of Sanskrit," *Journal of the Johnson Library and Museum* 3 (2009): 31–47.
10. See Jay Bregman, "Thomas M. Johnson the Platonist," *Dionysus* 15 (1991): 91–102; Anderson, *Platonism in the Midwest*, 7.
11. For this episode, see Thomas Moore Johnson, "Introduction," in Proclus, *Metaphysical Elements* (Osceola: Republican Press, 1909), xiii-xvi, reprinted in *Journal of the Johnson Library and Museum* 3 (2009): 14–17.
12. Quoted from Anderson, *Platonism in the Midwest*, 156.
13. On these influences, see Bregman, "Thomas M. Johnson," 91, 105–106.
14. For a complete list and discussion of Johnson's translations of Neoplatonic texts, see Anderson, *Platonism in the Midwest*, 173; Jay Bregman,

"Preface," in *The Collected Works of Thomas Moore Johnson: The Great American Platonist* (Westbury: Prometheus Trust, 2015), iv-ix.

15. The third periodical was the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, edited by Harris.
16. *The Platonist* I (1881), 1.
17. Johnson, "Introduction," xv.
18. Johnson, "Introduction," xv.
19. Johnson, "Introduction," xvi.
20. *The Platonist* III (1887), 1.
21. *The Platonist* I (1881), 1.
22. On this notion, see Bregman ("Thomas M. Johnson"), who calls Johnson a "pagan–Christian syncretist" (p. 96) in the spirit of "Renaissance syncretism" (p. 102).
23. Johnson himself used this phrase—see *The Platonist* II (1884), 1, as discussed in Anderson, *Platonism in the Midwest*, 55; 62—to refer to the American Akademe's interest for various viewpoints in religion without loyalty to any. For this Platonic organization and Johnson's involvement in it, see Anderson, *Platonism in the Midwest*, 52–68.
24. It appears that Johnson had a complex relationship with Christianity. According to his son Franklin—see *The Thomas Moore Johnson Collection* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1949), 5—he was scornful of it in his youth, but later developed an appreciation for Christian theologians such as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, and even considered joining—quite logically—a Unitarian church. Bregman (see his preface to *The Collected Works of Thomas Moore Johnson*, i) has suggested that while Johnson's early reading of Emerson contributed to his distaste for institutionalized, dominant Christianity, he acknowledged the latter "as part of a syncretistic synthesis with Platonism" (p. iv). Indeed, as Johnson himself stated in *The Platonist* (II, 1884, 1), he believed in "the harmony of the teachings of pure Christianity with the esoteric doctrines of the various ancient faiths." In this sense, much like, as I will argue, Jewish Kabbalah and Sufism, this form of "pure," Neoplatonically bent Christianity represents another piece of the puzzle in Johnson's "Western esotericism."
25. For various definitions of Western esotericism, including this "religionist" one, see Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 1–14 (and pp. 10–12 in particular). For another perspective, see Kocku von Stuckrad, "Western Esotericism: Towards an Integrative Model of Interpretation," *Religion* 35 (2005): 78–97. As we shall see, among other factors, Johnson's longstanding engagement with Indian and Persian traditions including Sufism and yoga might make the descriptor "Western" problematic to apply to the form of esotericism he was after. Indeed, the overall scholarly use of this

"Western" category in the study of esotericism has been criticized in Kennet Granholm, "Locating the West: Problematizing the Western in Western Esotericism and Occultism," in *Occultism in a Global Perspective*, eds. Henrik Bogdan and Gordan Djurdjevic (Durham: Acumen, 2013), 31–32 as well as in Egil Asprem, "Beyond the West: Towards a New Comparativism in the Study of Esotericism," *Correspondences* 2 (2014): 4; 7–11. My provisional use of the term "Western" is intended to signal that Johnson—a Westerner—accessed all kinds of esoteric wisdom invariably through the mediation of translations and presentations prepared by, and explicitly intended for, Westerners—mostly in connection with the Theosophical Society.

26. On this point, see Bregman, "Thomas M. Johnson," 92; 108. See also Julie Chajes, *Recycled Lives: A History of Reincarnation in Blavatsky's Theosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 108–131.
27. See Vadim Putzu, "Kabbalah in the Ozarks: Thomas Moore Johnson, *The Platonist*, and the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor," in *Kabbalah in America*, ed. Brian Ogren (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 96–98.
28. To be precise, Ginsburg was born into a Jewish family, but eventually converted to Christianity.
29. Specifically, Johnson owned Lévi's 1861 *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie* as well as *The Mysteries of Magic*, an 1886 English language digest of Lévi's writings. For Johnson's special fascination with Lévi, see infra.
30. Adolphe Louis Constant, aka Eliphas Lévi (1810–1875) was a Parisian Catholic seminary student turned occultist, whom scholars typically view as the last Christian kabbalist but also as the initiator of nineteenth-century occultist Kabbalah. For our purposes, it is worth noting that, in his essay on Lévi's understanding of Kabbalah—see Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "The Beginnings of Occultist Kabbalah: Adolphe Franck and Éliphas Lévi," in *Kabbalah and Modernity: Interpretations, Transformations, Adaptations*, eds. Boaz Huss, Marco Pasi, and Kocku von Stuckrad, (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 107–128—Hanegraaff argues that Lévi's perspective is a form of non-historical perennialism grounded in the *prisca theologia* tradition of the Renaissance.
31. Recurring Jewish authors featured in Johnson's collection of Kabbalistic works are Neoplatonic thinkers such as Solomon ibn Gabirol, Azriel of Gerona, Abraham Cohen de Herrera, and Leone Ebreo.
32. A prominent Theosophical Society member and Madame Blavatsky's physician, in 1877 Pancoast published *The Kabbala: The True Science of Light*, combining non-Jewish esotericism with contemporary science and medicine. See Julie Chajes, "Seth Pancoast and the Kabbalah: Medical Pluralism and the Reception of Physics in Late-Nineteenth Century Philadelphia," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 40 (2018):

131–162. Despite being hailed by fellow Theosophists as the most competent Kabbalist in the United States at the time, apparently Pancoast never succeeded in winning Johnson over with his version of Kabbalah (see Bowen and Johnson, *Letters to the Sage*, vol. 1, 339).

33. For the vicissitudes of *The Platonist*, see Anderson, *Platonism in the Midwest*, 170–173.
34. *The Platonist* I (1881), 1.
35. *The Platonist* III (1887), 1. The broadening of the scope of the materials published in this journal beyond Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy was already in the making since 1884, as testified by Johnson's salutatory to volume 2 (1884), 1–2.
36. "Kabalistic Doctrine of Spirits," *The Platonist* II (1884), 14–16; 19–24. Translated from the French by Abner Doubleday.
37. "Solution of Philosophical Problems" and "The Magnetic Mysteries," *The Platonist* II (1885), 130–131 and 131–132 respectively. Translated from French by William Trockmorton.
38. This project was announced in January 1887, in the first issue of *The Platonist* III, 29. For more details on Johnson's failed attempt, see Putzu, "Kabbalah in the Ozarks," 97–98; 100.
39. See his announcement in *The Platonist* II (1885), 129. For Lévi's statement on the importance of both *Sefer Yezirah* and the writings collected in *Kabbala Denudata* for a correct understanding of Kabbalah, see for example his *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie* (Paris: Germer Baillere, 1861) as translated in Arthur Waite, *The Mysteries of Magic: A Digest of the Writings of Eliphas Lévi* (London: George Redway, 1886), 18.
40. "Notes on the Kabbalah," *The Platonist* III (1887), 23–36 and 91–101. The other main source for Johnson's compilation is Ginsburg, whom he must have appreciated for maintaining that Kabbalah's distinctive tenets derive from Neoplatonism. For a detailed analysis of Johnson's "Notes on the Kabbalah," see Putzu, "Kabbalah in the Ozarks," 100–103.
41. "The Taro," *The Platonist* II (1885), 126–128.
42. Burgoyne, born Thomas Henry Dalton (1855–1943?) was a British astrologer and self-professed medium, who served as the "private secretary of the exterior circle" of the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, and authored several of the group's fundamental texts. His most influential publication, *The Light of Egypt*, was translated in multiple European languages and attracted the attention of the famous French occultist Papus. On Burgoyne/Dalton see Joscelyn Godwin, Christian Chanel, and John P. Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor: Initiatic and Historical Documents of an Order of Practical Occultism* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1995), 33–39; Bowen and Johnson, *Letters to the Sage*, vol. 1, 122–123.
43. See "The Kabbalah," *The Platonist* III (1887), 106–112.

44. See "The Taro," *The Platonist* III (1887), 354–357; 407–410; 478–482; 571–576; 655–660; and IV (1888), 41–47. For the influence of Lévi's and Christian's teachings on this essay, see Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 379. Paul Christian (real name Jean-Baptiste Pitois, 1811–1877) was the author of a widely read *Historie de la Magie, du monde Surnaturel et de la fatalité à travers les Temps et les Peuples* (1870), which was translated into English by Doubleday in 1884 (see Bowen and Johnson, *Letters to the Sage*, vol. 1, 159–162).
45. For a discussion of Burgoyne's writings, including those published under the pseudonym "Zanoni," see Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 37–39; Bowen and Johnson, *Letters to the Sage*, vol. 1, 122–123.
46. See *The Platonist* III (1887), 26–27. Despite drawing from the neoplatonizer Ginsburg, here Johnson further remarks that Kabbalistic ideas about the preexistence and transmigration of human souls need to be interpreted neoplatonically in order to be correctly understood.
47. See *The Platonist* IV (1888), 212–224; 225–231; 281–298. Synesius (c. 373–410) was a Greek-speaking pagan philosopher who converted to Christianity in Alexandria of Egypt and eventually became the bishop of Ptolemais. On Synesius' syncretism and its influence among American Transcendentalists and Theosophists more generally, see Jay Bregman, "Synesius of Cyrene and the American 'Synesii'," *Numen* 63 (2016): 299–316.
48. See Isaac Myer, *Qabbalah*. Philadelphia, 1888. On this work and its author, see Boaz Huss "The Qabbalah of the Hebrews and the Ancient Wisdom Religion of Asia: Isaac Myer and the Kabbalah in America," in *Kabbalah in America*, 72–93. In the only extant letter he sent to Johnson (Myer to Johnson, November 5, 1888, unpublished letter), while not mentioning Kabbalah at all, Myer discusses the possible Indian origins of certain Neoplatonic doctrines.
49. See *The Platonist* III (1887), 561–571.
50. Wilder (1823–1908) was a pioneer of holistic medicine and a polyglot interested in various forms of esoteric thinking, including Platonism and transcendentalism. As a professional editor, he worked on Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* in 1876 as well as for multiple journals, including Johnson's *The Platonist* and *Bibliotheca Platonica*. For more on Wilder, see Bowen and Johnson, *Letters to the Sage*, vol. 2, 13–62.
51. See *The Platonist* III (1887), 567–568. On *Sefer ha-Zohar* and its reception among nineteenth-century esotericists see, among others, Boaz Huss, "Admiration and Disgust: The Ambivalent Re-Canonization of the Zohar in the Modern Period," in *Study and Knowledge in Jewish Thought*, ed. Howard Kreisel (Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press,

2006), 203–237; Boaz Huss, "Translations of the Zohar: Historical Contexts and Ideological Frameworks," *Correspondences* 4 (2016), 81–128.

52. Schreiber (1852–1932) was a German-born American Reform rabbi and scholar, who was heavily influenced by the teachings of Abraham Geiger, Moritz Lazarus, and Manuel Joel. On Schreiber, see Frederick Haneman, "Schreiber, Emanuel," *Jewish Encyclopedia* 11 (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1906), 110.
53. See *The Platonist* III (1887), 423–434.
54. See *The Platonist* III (1887), 495–502.
55. See "Life of Hay ebn Yokdan [*sic*], The self-taught Philosopher," *The Platonist* I (1881–1882), 75–80; 162–164; II (1884), 3–4; 62–64; III (1887), 163–168; 225–235; 332–336; 410–416.
56. See *The Platonist* I (1881–82), 172–179.
57. See Bowen, "Magicians," 40.
58. See *The Platonist* III (1887), 296–308; 660–670; IV (1888), 48–56; 102–107; 136–144; 183–195. For more on Ruswa, see Bowen and Johnson, *Letters to the Sage*, vol. 1, 443–445.
59. See Johnson's footnote in *The Platonist* III (1887), 139: "Sufism originated long anterior to the Mohamedan invasion of India. It came from the Platonic fount."
60. See *The Platonist* III (1887), 391–392. See also the Sufi poems published in *The Platonist* III (1887), 368–371.
61. Tellingly, the two essays by Bjerregaard that Johnson chose to include in his journal are "The Historic Position and Value of Neo-Platonism &c.," *The Platonist* III (1887), 36–38, and "Papers on Sufism," *The Platonist* III (1887), 190–198; 262–265; 403–407. In the latter article, Bjerregaard highlights the parallelism between Sufi, Gnostic, and Kabbalistic metaphysics (p. 405), thereby betraying his syncretic, perennialist attitude, much like Johnson's. For more on Bjerregaard, theosophy, and Sufism, see Mark Sedgwick, *Western Sufism: From the Abbasids to the New Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 146–148.
62. See Bowen and Johnson, *Letters to the Sage*, vol. 1, 195–196.
63. See *The Platonist* III (1887), 224.
64. See Bowen, "Magicians," 40; Sedgwick, *Western Sufism*, 143–146.
65. See Bowen and Johnson, *Letters to the Sage*, vol. 1, 196.
66. See Bowen, "Magicians," 44; Bowen and Johnson, *Letters to the Sage*, vol. 1, 80–81.
67. See especially Anderson, *Platonism in the Midwest*, 67; 151–85.
68. Johnson officially joined the Theosophical Society in 1883, and was appointed to its American Board of Control in 1884. In that same year he joined the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, and became President of its American Central Council (aka the Committee of Seven) in 1886.

69. See especially Anderson (*Platonism in the Midwest*, 175–176), who claims that, beginning with volume III (1887), Johnson expanded the scope of *The Platonist* to include articles on "the oriental mysteries and the occult" only to seek more subscribers among Theosophical Society members and people interested in then fashionable esotericism. Actually, as mentioned above, *The Platonist* had already included occult material since vol. II (1884), which features in its first two issues Doubleday's translation of Eliphas Lévi's *Science des esprits*.
70. See Hanegraff, *Western Esotericism*, 10–12.
71. On Neoplatonism among Theosophists, see Bregman, "Thomas M. Johnson," 92; 108; Bregman, "Synesius," 300. For the affinities between Platonism and the metaphysics of the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, see Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 50–51.
72. Bowen (see Bowen and Johnson, *Letters to the Sage*, vol. 1, 74–76) suggests that by 1887 Johnson's involvement with the Theosophical Society completely ceased, and that he no longer served any role in the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor after 1893. However, his correspondence with Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor members such as Minnie Higgin and Helen Sumner continued until 1894, and with Sylvester Gould until 1907 (see Bowen and Johnson, *Letters to the Sage*, vol. 1, 185–186; 188; 453–455). Even more significantly, despite the 1885–86 feud between the Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor (for which see Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 306; 329–340), Johnson was still amicably corresponding with prominent Theosophical Society members such as William Kelsoe, George Mead, and Olcott as late as 1911 (see Bowen and Johnson, *Letters to the Sage*, vol. 1, 213; 258; 275).
73. Indeed, Johnson's library includes a number of books published by Theosophical Society members well after the 1885–86 controversy with the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, such as Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* (1893), Mead's *Orpheus* (1896) and *The Chaldean Oracles* (1908), as well as several of Mabel Collins' works written between 1886 and 1906. Johnson also continued to subscribe to periodicals related to the Theosophical Society and related esoteric groups, like *The Theosophical Review*, *The Brahmacharin*, and *The Metaphysical Magazine*, almost until the time of his passing.
74. See Bowen and Johnson, *Letters to the Sage*, vol. 1, 20–22; 41–42.
75. For Johnson's attempts to secure a personal deck of Tarot cards through the British jeweler and esotericist Thomas Henry Pattinson, see Bowen and Johnson, *Letters to the Sage*, vol. 1, 343–347. As late as 1895, Johnson

was still known in the US esoteric community as one of the few owners of Tarot cards (see Bowen and Johnson, *Letters to the Sage*, vol. 1, 480).

76. An interest in Lévi's ideas, including his Tarots, existed among Theosophists since the 1870s. See Julie Chajes, "Construction through Appropriation: Kabbalah in Blavatsky's Early Works," in *Theosophical Appropriations: Esotericism, Kabbalah, and the Transformation of Traditions*, eds. Julie Chajes and Boaz Huss (Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2016), 47; Bowen and Johnson, *Letters to the Sage*, vol. 1, 39–42. By the early 1880s, however, the Indian masters of Blavatsky and Olcott had decreed that Westerners were unfit for practical occultism, leading to a shift of focus in the Society's goals and activities. See John P. Deveney, "The Two Theosophical Societies: Prolonged Life, Conditional Immortality and the Individualized Immortal Monad," in Chajes and Huss, *Theosophical Appropriations*, 93–98. Regardless, Johnson's continuing eagerness to learn everything he could about the Tarot can be gleaned from the letters he exchanged between 1884 and 1887 with prominent Theosophical Society and Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor members, such as Alfred Cooper-Oakley (see Cooper-Oakley to Johnson, April 19, 1887, unpublished letter), Jirah Buck (see Bowen and Johnson, *Letters to the Sage*, vol. 1, 113; 120), Doubleday (see Bowen and Johnson, *Letters to the Sage*, vol. 1, 158–162), and Charles Quetil (Bowen and Johnson, *Letters to the Sage*, vol. 1, 361), as well as from his acquisition of Samuel Mathers' *The Tarot*, which was published only in 1888.

77. From its establishment in 1875 until the early 1880s the Theosophical Society focused on the occult work of developing an immortal astral self, which could exist as a godling independently of one's body. This practice included the use of magic mirrors for clairvoyance, and, to the extent that it was influenced by earlier esotericist Pascal Beverly Randolph, perhaps also the redeployment of sexual energy for occult purposes. See John P. Deveney, "Astral Projection or Liberation of the Double and the Work of the Early Theosophical Society," *Theosophical History Occasional Papers* 6 (1997); Deveney, "The Two Theosophical Societies," 93–114. From the late 1870s to about 1882 the Theosophical Society leaders also promoted the notion that astral travel could be attained through yoga. See Karl Baier, "Mesmeric Yoga and the Development of Meditation within the Theosophical Society," *Theosophical History* 16, no. 3&4 (2012): 152–154.

    For yoga in the early Theosophical Society and in the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, see Patrick Bowen, "'The real pure Yog': Yoga in the Early Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor," in *Imagining the East: The Early Theosophical Society*, ed. Tim Rudbog and Erik Sand (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 143–164. The use of sex and magic mirrors to separate one's astral double from the body and

connect with celestial beings became central to the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor's practical occultism, as attested in this order's instructional manuscripts "Laws of Magic Mirrors" and "The Mysteries of Eros" (for which see Godwin, Chanel and Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 71–74; 194–212; 213–278).

78. See his correspondence with Pattinson (Bowen and Johnson, *Letters to the Sage*, vol. 1, 346; 348) and with Ernest Sasseville (Bowen and Johnson, *Letters to the Sage*, vol. 1, 447–448).
79. See Bowen, "The real pure Yog," 153.
80. An unpublished letter from New York's Vedanta Society (Cape to Johnson, January 14, 1906) proves that Johnson was seeking to obtain yoga instruction from a Swami (likely Swami Abhedananda) as late as 1906.
81. On this point, see also see Whitaker, 1–3; 6; 8; 17–20.
82. Johnson's expectations about his children are suggested, on the one hand, by the middle names he gave to his sons (see above), and, on the other hand, by his concern over his daughter's spiritual potential (for which see Bowen and Johnson, *Letters to the Sage*, vol. 1, 188).
83. For early Theosophical Society doctrines about the soul and their similarities to the theurgy of Iamblichus and Proclus, see Bregman, "Synesius," 311–316; Chajes, *Recycled Lives*, 114–116; 125–128. See also Deveney, "Astral Projection;" Deveney, "The Two Theosophical Societies." Proclus' theurgy involves, among other deeds (see Anne Sheppard, "Proclus' attitude to theurgy," *Classical Quarterly* 32 (1982): 212–224) invocations and the ritual use of divine names to obtain oracles, providing thereby a connection with Lévi's practical Kabbalah. Such connection was acknowledged by the French occultist himself; see for example Lévi's *Paradoxes of the Highest Science* (Calcutta: Calcutta Central Press, 1883), 101–110.

    For resemblances between Platonic theurgy and South Asian yoga traditions, see Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995). As practiced in the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, yoga was intended to unite one's soul with God, defined as "that perfect being which alone is manifested in its own light" (see Bowen and Johnson, *Letters to the Sage*, vol. 1, 420).
84. The Neoplatonic authors Johnson was most appreciative of, such as Iamblichus, Damascius, and Proclus, identified spiritual union with the divine as the end of philosophy, and maintained that one's soul could achieve this goal through theurgy.
85. For Blavatsky's shift toward "Oriental Kabbalah" and the counter-appropriation of Jewish and Christian Kabbalah as markers of Western occultism, see Marco Pasi, "The Oriental Kabala and the Parting of East and West," in Boaz Huss, Marco Pasi, and Kocku von Stuckrad (eds.)

Kabbalah and Modernity: Interpretations, Transformations, Adaptations (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 151–166.

86. For this wishful augur, see Johnson's salutatory to *The Platonist* II (1884), 1.
87. Anderson, *Platonism in the Midwest*, 179–180; 183–184; 186. See also Bregman, "Thomas M. Johnson," 102.

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CHAPTER 13

Astrology, Letters, and the Cosmos: Ferid Vokopola's Syncretism

Gianfranco Bria

This chapter aims to analyze the thought of a leading Albanian intellectual, Ferid Vokopola (1887–1969), who outlined his esoteric views of man and the world in the form of a number of articles that appeared in *Njeriu* (The Man), an Albanian magazine published during the interwar period by a Sufi association, *Drita Hyniore* (Holy Light).[1] Vokopola wrote these articles during a period of great political and cultural ferment that involved the entire Mediterranean region; moreover, in that period, the Italian Fascist kingdom invaded Albania, imposing an internal political and cultural reorganization. Previously, the young Albanian nation had conducted an intense debate about the relationship between state, religion and civic identity that was mainly fashioned by the claims of Albanian nationalism that had a marked secular/ecumenical character, which sanctioned the priority of linguistic/ethnic identity over religion, although Islam was the major denomination of the country (70 percent Muslim, 20 percent Orthodox Christian and 10 percent Catholic).[2]

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Vokopola took a full part in the state-building process and his articles expressed the existential and humanist reflections arising from his political and personal experiences. He wanted to find an answer at the difficult moment in which Albania was under Italian rule and human beings were agonizing in the conflict of Second World War. Looking from Ottoman Sufi legacy to Western occultism,[3] Vokopola stated his arguments for finding a "common matrix" or "hidden original doctrine" in Gnosticism, Kabbalah, Hermeticism, Sufism and the Hindu traditions, revealing his personal existential aims. Despite his Sufi commitment, being himself a Rifaʿi *murīd* (disciple), Vokopola adopted a syncretic perspective[4] to argue his conceptualizations, as he amalgamated and combined several religious meanings and symbols of different religious or cultural traditions.

This chapter aims to analyze if and how Vokopola was oriented by, and linked to, some scholars who belonged to Traditionalist and Theosophical *milieux*; further, how Islamic and Sufi backgrounds influenced his speculations. The following questions are asked: how did Vokopola create his conceptualization? What were his sources or references? This chapter aims finally to understand how Vokopola's intellectual and political legacy framed his argumentation or else if his Sufi initiatory path led his ontological questionings to grasp hidden knowledge behind the revealed.

This chapter examines, therefore, how he constructed his thought, focusing on his personal experience (patriotic, political, intellectual) and on his religious affiliation as a Sufi *murīd*. This chapter first describes Vokopola's esoteric literary production, and then shows how it echoes Western esoteric sources, notably Édouard Schuré (1841–1929). Vokopola, however, was also drawing on the tradition of Islamic esotericism, as this chapter will then show. Finally, it argues that Vokopola's motivations should be understood in terms of the nature of Albanian nationalism at the time, and of the challenges facing it.

Ferid Vokopola

Ferid Vokopola was born on August 18, 1887, in Berat, central Albania, where he finished primary and high school. Subsequently, he undertook university studies in law and economics in Istanbul. In 1908, during his university years, he began to support the Albanian national cause by writing for some patriotic newspapers in Turkey, such as *Zgjimi* (Awakening) and *Bashkimi i Kombit* (The Union of the Nation).[5] After graduating, at 25, Vokopola returned to Albania to participate in the establishment of the Albanian nation, signing the Declaration of Independence on the

Ngritjen and *Flamurit* (Flag Day) in Vlorë on November 28, 1912. In 1914, Vokopola became part of the government of Ismael Qemali for a few months as finance minister, and in 1920 he participated in the Congress of Lushnjë, which guaranteed Albanian national integrity.[6] From 1923 to 1925 and from 1927 to 1928, Vokopola was minister of agriculture and world affairs; from 1928 to 1939, he was again elected deputy representing the prefecture of Berat, distinguishing himself by several legislative initiatives, including the production of the Civil Code in 1930.[7] After the Fascist invasion in 1939, Vokopola decided to leave all administrative and political positions, and mainly focused on several works that he wrote until his death in 1969. Throughout his life, Vokopola remained religiously committed, being himself a *murīd* following the Rifaʿi path; with Salih bej Vuçitërni (1881–1949), he contributed to the formation of the Islamic Community of Albania (*Komuteti Mysilman Shqiptare*) in 1923 and to the creation of the General Madrasa of Tirana.[8] In 1936, Vokopola became the co-founder and director of the Shoqata Drita Hyjnore (Divine Light Association), of which he was one of the main managers. Drita Hyjnore grouped five different Sufi brotherhoods (*ṭuruq*), namely the Rifaʿiyya, the Qadiriyya, the Tijaniyya, the Saʿdiyya and the Naqshbandiyya, under the direction of the Islamic Community of Albania.[9] Vokopola also wrote in other Islamic magazines such as *Zane i Nalte* (The Divine Voice)[10] and *Kultura Islame* (Islamic Culture),[11] which dealt mainly with moral and religious issues. He also produced several mystical poems, including a poem dedicated to the feast of the birth of ʿAli ibn Abi Talib ("Mevludi i Aliu"), which is still recited by Albanian Sufis during the *newruz*[12] on March 22 of every year.

Njeriu

Vokopola wrote several articles about Sufism and other esoteric issues in *Njeriu* (Man),[13] a monthly or bimonthly magazine published by Drita Hyjnore from 1939 to 1942, during the period of Fascist domination (1939–1943), which probably favored contacts with Italian and European intellectual circles and networks. *Njeriu* published several issues that dealt with mystical, metaphysical and philosophical themes, as well as translations of short essays and Albanian poems. The magazine also treated other subjects, such as economy, fashion, news and proverbs; it aimed to raise the level of the discussion about various religious and secular matters; moreover, the editors, above all Vokopola, wanted to adopt an innovative and interdisciplinary approach that could be topical and sharp. Many

articles had a comparative purpose, which mixed religious traditions and positive sciences, such as psychoanalysis and economics.

Many articles treated the origin of physics, the relationship between religions and psychoanalysis, or the future of human beings[14] at the time of the world war. One of these articles was "Randësi të Pikës në Misticism e Atomsim" (The Weight of the Point in Mysticism and Atomism)[15] which dealt, from different epistemological perspectives, with the concept of the point in space and time, comparing recent discoveries in physics and Islamic reasoning. In this article, Vokopola argues that the point, in Sufism as in physics, goes beyond the observable outward that is typical of physics. In reality, "the mystery of the point" would be tripartite: the first external part, observable, like the aesthetic aspect of the atom, the stars; the second part forms the things that possess the "negative" energy, such as the sentences of a book, the body of the planets, the electrons; the third part would be the essence of the whole, which contains positive energy, like the meaning of a book, the fire of the planets. All three aspects constitute the point that contains the true and absolute unity of all visible and invisible beings. For Vokopola, all these points correspond to the focal and vital point of Islamic mysticism.

In the ninth number of *Njeriu*, Vokopola wrote "Ku shkon njerzimi?" (Where is Humanity Going?),[16] which questioned the technological and material progress that had been able to realize incredible material results. For him, on the other hand, the contemporary world had lost any mystical or spiritual realization, which represented, according to the author, the main factors in the development of civilization. In the next issue, Vokopola wrote "Përse përpiqen dy shpirta" (Why We Feel two Spirits),[17] which accused people of being too selfish, of forgetting their "real" origins. In this sense, for Vokopola, man would experience a crisis of identity arising from the tensions between the old mentality and the new identity; the new world would be shaken by liberalism, capitalism and rationalism that would have lost the legacy of supra-rational revelations which are now overwhelmed by "selfish capitalist logic." The author defends the Eastern esoteric traditions that could restore love and dignity to "a modern humanity that is now dedicated to a materialism without constraints and immediate entertainment," but hopes that the serious sacrifices (of the world war) may give a convincing lesson to establish peace.

Vokopola treated again the suffering of war in his next article "Vuajtjet e jetës dhe zëri i shpëtimit" (The Sufferings of Life and the Voice of Salvation).[18] Firstly, he quoted Buddha, who had to fight against the

"suffering that comes from passions and desires." The author also mentions the Greek philosophers, such as Plato, Pythagoras and Socrates, who fought against "insatiable selfishness;" for Vokopola, the sermons of Jesus tried to lighten the darkness of selfishness; Muhammad, who combined the qualities of Adam, Moses and Jesus, was the light capable of clearing the darkness, good against evil, hope against terror. The *taṣāwwuf* (Sufi) method established by the Prophet "could annihilate selfishness, summarize all the esoteric doctrine, but it needs practice and mastery."[19] Vokopola, in the last article in *Njeriu*, "Qëllimi i njishëme i Feve"[20] (The Unified Purpose of Religions), suggests that good feelings—love, friendship, or goodness—need religious sentiments to distinguish good from evil. He also wrote minor works, mostly poems, about Sufi traditions, actuality and morality.[21]

"On the Practice of Mysteries"

Vokopola fully explained his views on human beings, the cosmos, and nature in his longest article, published in the second issue of *Njeriu* in 1930, "Në prakun Mystereve"[22] (On the Practice of Mysteries). This article treated the question of mysteries as a pattern of human mysticism that "shaped the human form and gave it an incredibly brilliant spirit."[23] For Vokopola, the mysteries are "the absolute principles, infinite knowledge, sources of wisdom and power behind external appearances." According to him, mystical knowledge needs to grasp the meaning of the mysteries that are therefore elusive: the "ancient Egyptians"[24] firstly grasped the spiritual essence of the mysteries behind the exterior of things. Isis, the ancient Egyptian deity, was the first to catch the fleeting nature of the mysteries, grasping their essence; after her, Brahma in Hinduism, Hermes, Pythagoras, Plato and the other mystical characters were inspired by the "Isis state" to conduct their spiritual searches to grasp the mysteries. Their spiritual development involved two paths, one exoteric, the other esoteric, which only people with a particular spiritual talent could grasp.[25] For Vokopola, Hermes, then Pythagoras and Plato, inspired by ancient Egyptians, outlined the truth of theological and mystical knowledge that laid the foundations of monotheism. Vokopola stated, in fact, that the perception of the mysteries is a hereditary issue, and therefore that there exists a genealogy among the prophets and mystics capable of perceiving the "supreme Truth."

For Vokopola, the "keys to reach the knowledge of the Ancient Egyptians [the mysteries]: in the divine activity, nothing can be small or

large, as it is elusive; two, God is omnipresent and immortal."[26] Only people who do not have a bad spirit can grasp these mysteries; it follows that only some men, endowed with superior intellect and pure heart, can access certain esoteric states. According to Vokopola, "These traits accompanied Hermes and all the other Prophets and other enlightened men, such as ʿAli ibn Abi Talib who would then leave his legacy to the (twelve) imams."[27] He explains it through combinations of Egyptian numerology and Arabic alphabets that link 32 letters to corresponding images and numbers. Therefore, one corresponds to *alif*, which expresses the divine world, "the absolute being" which emanates to all other beings, according to Pimander's initial step, when Hermes is in front of the Supreme Intellect during his initiatory journey.[28]

For Vokopola, only the teachings of a master and constant practice would help a *murīd* to catch the esoteric meaning; modern materialisms are against esoteric meanings and are destroying the spiritual research of the mysteries:[29] "men would have lost the habit of facing the mysterious nature of the Mysteries." In particular, contemporary men "no longer consider the tripartite nature of the human being—bodily, conscious and spiritual—which would be crushed by the *nafs* (ego)."[30] For Vokopola, human sciences have the same tripartite nature (astrology, science and arithmetic) as stated[31] in the encyclopedic work *Mevzûatü'l-ʿUlûm* (Subject Matters of the Sciences), volume I. The *Mevzû'âtü'l-ʿUlûm* is a treatise written by Ahmed bin Mustafa Taşköprîzâde (1495–1561) which deals with the epistemological field, the ontological purposes and the historical perspectives of science, starting from some basic concepts. This work, originally written in Arabic in two volumes, was edited and translated into Turkish by İkdâm Matbaası in 1897, because of its didactic approach to classical sciences, under the claims of several scholars who wanted to renew the Ottoman epistemology.[32] He used this text to explain that the human being is a compendium of the natural world, which refers, as explained below, to microcosm-macrocosm analogy.

Vokopola explains his conception of man, who is considered a "complete" being that encompasses the whole world. For him, the body of the human being would be a reproduction of the cosmos, formed by planets and stars;[33] it would also be the whole world in miniature, as it summarizes all animals, plants and minerals. These analogies of the human body as a cosmos and natural kingdom are reported by Vokopola in a box on the article (see Figs. 13.1 and 13.2). Figure 13.1 depicts the man composed by planets and stars; Fig. 13.2 shows the man composed of different

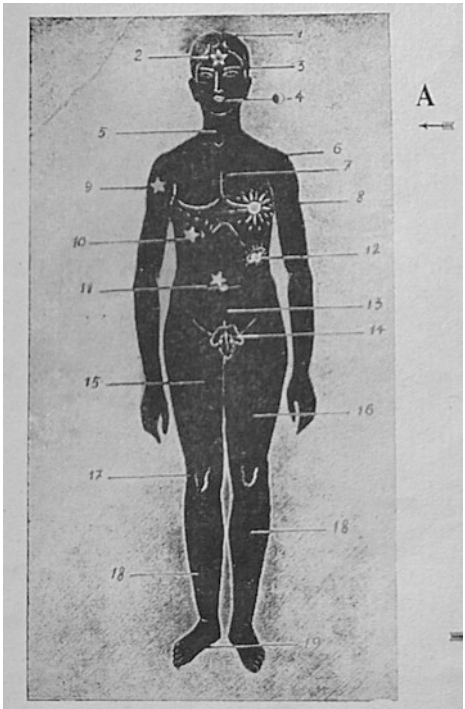
A
1. Kryet=Burxhi: Dash (Bélier) arabisht: (Hamel)
2. Balli=Ylli; Premte (Vénus) Arab.: (Zyhre)
3. Vetullat=Burxhi: Virgjinesha (vierge) Arab. (Synbyle).
4. Goja=Ylli: Hëna (Luni) Arab. (Kamer).
5. Qafa=Burxhi: Kau (Taureau) Arab. (Thevr).
6. Supi=Burxhi: Binjaku (Géméaux) Arab. (Xhevza)
7. Krahrori=Burxhi: Luani (Lion) Arab. (Esed)
8. Zëmbra=Ylli: Dielli (Soleil) Arab. (Shems).
9. Krahët=Ylli: Merkuri (Mercure) Arab. (Ytarid).
10. Mushkritë=Ylli: Ejte (Jupiter) Arab. (Myshteri).
11. Kërthiza=Yllí: Marsi (Mars) Arab. (Merrih).
12. Shpretka=Ylli: Shtuni (Saturne) Arab. (Zuhal).
13. Barku=Burxhi: Pesha (Balance) Arab. (Mizan).
14. Pjella=Burxhi: Sfurku (Scorpion) Arab. (Akreb).
15. Kofshët=Burxhi: Konser (Cancer) Arab. (Seretan).
16. Pulpa=Burxhi: Harku (Sagittaire) Arab. (Kavs).
17. Kupat e gjurit=Burxhi: Kaprollja (Capricorne) Arabisht (Xhedi).
18. Këmbët=Burxhi: Peshku (Poisson).... Arab. (Hut).

Fig. 13.1 Vokopola's analogy of the human body as a cosmos. Vokopola, "Në prakun e Mystereve," 5

Fig. 13.2 Vokopola's analogy of the human body as natural kingdom. Vokopola, "Në prakun e Mystereve," 5

animals, plants and minerals. Below the first figure, there is a legend that indicates the partition of the human body into 19 parts: twelve are the planets (*burxhi*), seven are the stars (*ylli*) and each of them corresponds to a specific part of the human body.[34] For each star, Vokopola finds a planet that represents its chiasm, that is, its antithesis; similarly, for each planet, he finds a zodiac sign that represents its negation. For him, this dichotomy explains the dualistic and conflictual nature of the existence, as the yin and yang conception in Chinese Taoism. Vokopola provides also a French and Arabic translation of the planets and zodiac signs that make up these analogies.

According to Vokopola, Fig. 13.1 represents the "mystical and esoteric" essence of the human self. Figure 13.2, on the other hand, involves

the material (exoteric) aspects of human life. For him, several "studies have shown that the human body is a miniature model that encompasses all the evolutionary phases of man."[35] The same medical tests attested that each human limb corresponds to an animal, plant or mineral. According to Vokopola, man is linked to the great spiritual world and represents the small world that contains all terrestrial entities. His arguments proposed the analogy of man as a microcosm and macrocosm[36] that is widely dealt with in Islamic literature and also in other philosophical and religious traditions.[37]

Traditionalist/Occultist Backgrounds

In "Në prakun Mystereve," as in others works, Vokopola created a syncretic approach toward the world and human doctrines, merging several religious traditions to explain his teleological view about the material and immaterial worlds: the presence of a common matrix behind everything, that is, the mysteries. At that time, this kind of approach was quite widespread in European intellectual circles where some thinkers claimed to have discovered the links between the human being, the world, and the cosmos. In many ways, Vokopola shared several features with Western esoteric movements,[38] especially with the Traditionalist movement that, according to Mark Sedgwick, considered "tradition" as belief and practice transmitted from time immemorial—or rather belief and practice that should have been transmitted but was lost to the West during the last half of the second millennium AD.[39] Traditionalist thinkers such as René Guénon (1886–1951)[40] and Julius Evola (1898–1974)[41] stated that the modern West was in crisis because it had lost the transmission of the tradition. Vokopola also supported this theory, as modern man had lost "sensitive abilities;" furthermore, like Guénon, he wrote about his engagement with the Vedic tradition and generally a comparative approach that covered what Guénon called "Oriental metaphysics," which included the Vedanta, at the center of what Guénon called "traditional civilizations."[42] Both Vokopola and Guénon have the same elitist view, the counterpart of the elect who could grasp the "true essence," according to Vokopola. The Albanian scholar treated extensively the books of Hermes and the myth of ancient Egypt as "the original source of Mysteries;" although Guénon paid less attention to those themes and did not deal with the notion of mysteries: Guénon used to talk about "tradition," while Vokopola uses the term "mysteries," which would indicate a substantially different approach.

Vokopola may have been mostly inspired by the works of occultist-perennialist thinkers who dealt with many sources from which Guénon developed the Traditionalist philosophy. Colonel Henry Olcott (1832–1907), the co-founder of the Theosophical Society, aimed to conduct comparative research in religion in order to find "ancient wisdom" in the primordial source of all religion: Hermes and the Vedas.[43] Like Vokopola (and Guénon), Olcott stated that the Vedas were primordial knowledge; both believed that the books of Hermes also could provide superior inspiration, following Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) who firstly dealt with the *Corpus Hermeticum*.[44] These themes were quite widespread in French Masonic circles in the eighteenth century and they later flourished at the start of the nineteenth century among perennialist scholars such as Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882). The Theosophical Society treated Hermetism, Vedic tradition and occultism in its two most successful books, *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), written by Helena Blavatsky (1931–1891).[45] The main Theosophical creed—the common spiritual doctrine that oriented all world religions—inspired many contemporary thinkers, like Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), who joined the Theosophical Society before making an epistemological shift and founding the Anthroposophical Society.[46] Steiner stated that the spiritual world orients the physical world and its constant evolution.[47] Using Hindu conceptions of karma and reincarnation, Steiner asserted that human beings too evolve through continuous reincarnations.[48] Vokopola shares this idea when he asserts the existence of a chain of reincarnations from Hermes to ʿAli. Like Steiner, Vokopola believed that the material world mirrors the spiritual world; both proposed the analogy of man as microcosm-macrocosm, using the "scientific method"[49] to attest it. They presented the "two worlds" model, arguing that natural science reflects spiritual science; when they are in harmony, the spiritual world takes precedence, while natural science provokes madness, the so-called materialism that has ruined the modern world.[50] Vokopola asserts specific analogies between material world and human body that have no similarities with Steiner's arguments, but which further elaborate the mirroring between natural and spiritual sciences.[51]

Steiner and Theosophist theories heavily influenced Schuré,[52] the author of the main source that Vokopola cited in his writings, *Les grands initiés* (The Great Initiates). Schuré was a convinced Theosophist in that he believed in reincarnation and pantheism—he considered himself an initiate—and participated in several meetings of the Theosophical Society,

although he never joined it.[53] He strongly argued for the existence of some "occult mysteries," knowledge of which could unveil certain forms of superior knowledge: the Absolute Truth. His texts sought to return to a universal religious thought, the hidden *esōterikós*;[54] Schuré's goal was to trace fragments of truth, or rather of "the Truth." His main work, *Les grands initiés*, does not openly make an historical claim, but is, rather, dedicated to a comparative analysis between the stories of different prophets and philosophers, such as Jesus, Pythagoras, Hermes and Moses. His intent is to rediscover an occult *fil rouge* between the different religious and philosophical traditions, which had the same original matrix, the "mysteries" of which Hermes was the first holder. Many narratives in the text were invented by Schuré, who took inspiration from texts such as the Bible, the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the Vedanta.

Vokopola used many parts of Schuré's *Les grands initiés*, including the idea about the mysteries being "the Supreme knowledge that derive originally from the Egyptians." Both Vokopola and Schuré believed that this knowledge is hereditary, that only "great chosen people," like Hermes or Moses, could grasp it. In this sense, Guénon, Vokopola and Schuré adopted the same elitist conception. Furthermore, Vokopola probably learned directly about some issues or took some text, such as the Poimandres (the first tractate in the *Corpus Hermeticum*), using *Les grands initiés* as the main source: many parts of his article were directly inspired by Schuré's work, especially those that treated Hermetic doctrines. Vokopola also elaborated some themes that the French scholar did not deal with in his works, like the microcosm-macrocosm analogy, which seems to be inspired by Steiner's anthroposophy. In this way, it seems that Vokopola composed this work using several arguments and topics that he borrowed from other contemporary thinkers. Despite this, he mostly kept his focus on his main topic, which he knew best: Islamic esotericism.

Islamic Legacy

Many aspects of Vokopola's chosen topics directly or indirectly treated Islamic issues, because he was a Sufi *murīd* on the Rifaʿi path. Vokopola wrote many works that solely dealt with religious arguments and even religious poems which attested his deep knowledge of Islamic doctrines, especially the Sufism that he considered one of the main sources of human knowledge. He positioned ʿAli at the end of the chain of reincarnations that he borrowed from Theosophical theories. However, Sufis deal

extensively with the topic of the chain of spiritual descent that is expressed by *silsila* (chain), the continuous line of spiritual descent through which the head of an order, the *shaykh* or *pīr*, is connected with a person regarded as the order's founder and then back to the Prophet.[55] In some ways, the topic of the mysteries could also have some analogies with the *khirqa* (cloak)[56] that a Sufi master (*shaykh*) gives to his *murīd*: both refer to a hidden knowledge that the elect can receive. Theosophical doctrines and Schuré inspired Vokopola's notion of reincarnation: for him, the chain of descent of the mysteries is ontological; otherwise, in Islamic tradition, the Sufi legacy is acquired by blood or selection.

Vokopola's argument about the microcosmic-macrocosmic analogy seems to be very much inspired by Islamic doctrines, not just Theosophical arguments. Several Islamic authors addressed this theme, which possesses an extraordinary correspondence with other esoteric traditions;[57] anyhow the microcosmic-macrocosmic analogy was widely developed within Islamic esoterism by the idea of Muhammad's perfection (as *al-insān al-kāmil*, the perfect or realized man) that encompasses and reflects all divine and terrestrial qualities. *Al-insān al-kāmil* doctrine, that probably had its best treatment in Ibn 'Arabi's and al-Jili's thoughts,[58] was largely embodied by numerous mystical orders of the Ottoman empire, especially by Bektashi order. The eponymous founder of such order, Hajji Bektashi Veli (1209–1271), speaks about the creation of humans through the letters forming the name Muhammad,[59] and the *Makalat* (Teachings), a treatise attributed to him, described man as a microcosm, using quadripartite patterns to assert human cosmic analogies (see below).

> The human head is akin to the Throne. In this world, as well, there is heaven and earth. Hence, the back (*arka*) of the body resembles heaven and its feet (*daban*) resemble earth. The head is supported by the back and the back is supported by the feet. Likewise the Throne is supported by earth and whatever falls from heaven, the earth accepts. In addition, the intellect (*'akil*) resembles the moon; Spiritual Understanding (*ma'rifat*) resembles the Sun; and learning (*'ilim*) resembles the stars. Everyday the sun ascends and rises over the world. But only a heart with Spiritual Understandings ascends; no other rises. Let us elaborate upon spiritual knowledge from the perspective of Adamic knowledge (*adam 'ilmi*), if Allah so wills. And there is the seven-layered heaven, the body likewise has seven layers, the first layer is skin, followed by flesh, blood, veins, nerves, bone and marrow. Hence, these are similar to the seven-layered heaven. Moreover, in the world there are clouds and there is rain. Worry is similar to clouds and the tears of the

> eye resemble rain. The bones of man are similar to mountains. There are seven drowning seas. There are in the world seven seas. In the body, there are also seven seas, all submerging: The first one is the eye, it is submerged in seeing. The second is the tongue, it is submerged in speaking. The third is the ear; it is submerged in hearing. The fourth is the stomach; it is submerged in digesting. The fifth is the abdomen; it is submerged in hunger. The sixth is pain; it is submerged in mortality. The seventh is love; it is submerged in madness (*cününlik*). Moreover, in the world there are rivers and the tears of the eye resemble rivers. In addition, there are villages in the world, while bodies (*andāmlar*) are similar to villages. Likewise, in the world there are trees and fingers resemble trees. Moreover, there is grass and underbrush and hair resemble grass while the arms are similar to shrubbery.[60]

Some literary classics attributed to the Bektashi tradition also propose a similar treatment of man as cosmos. For example, a poem attributed to Virani Baba, one of the "Great Seven" (*Yedi Ulu Ozan*) poets of Bektashi tradition, reports a brief anthropomorphic description and iconographic representation[61] of man as a microcosm,[62] following the *Makalat* speculation.[63] In the *Kitab-ı Maghlata* (The Book of Prattle), the main work of Qayghusuz Abdal[64] on Bektashi doctrines, the man's exoteric dimension is a mirror image of the universe, the universe is a mirror image of man's esoteric dimension, its shadow which is farther away from the all-encompassing sun of God.[65]

According to Algar, Hajji Bektashi believed in the affinity of the Arabic letters with the human form, a central aspect of the *ḥurūfī* doctrines,[66] that, according to several scholars, found its most significant prolongation and propagation in associations with the Bektashi order in the Balkans.[67]

Vokopola can be seen to know well this kind of doctrine in his short unpublished manuscript entitled *Mendime dhe studime historike*, *Hurufitë*, *Hurufitë shqiptar burimi dhe doktina e tyre* (Historical Thoughts and Studies about *ḥurūfism*: Albanian *ḥurūfīs* and their Doctrine),[68] which cited many treatises conserved in Albanian Bektashi *tekke*. One of these treatises, attributed to a certain Baba Abdel Qerimi-Hindia (1864–?),[69] proposed an analogy of man as a microcosm,[70] which presented several similarities with Vokopola's work ("Në prakun Mystereve") and Hajji Bektashi's speculations in *Makalat*.

Although not directly, this mystical tradition, which encompasses almost all Sufi orders in the Balkans, could have oriented Vokopola in the creation of his models of man as microcosm-macrocosm and also in the

formulation of other assertions, such as the science of letters[71] that he employed to explain some of the analogies between human parts, planets, zodiac signs and specific letters. Furthermore, Vokopola's speculations and Bektashi doctrines seem also to have in common incarnationism,[72] the belief that the form of man is the form of divine will. Bektashis reached this conclusion through their view of ʿAli as godhead; while Vokopola through his idea of the Prophetic genealogical line that transmits the "hidden mysteries."

These kinds of anthropomorphic and incarnationist doctrines, embodied also in the Sufi practical and doctrinal corpus that does not belong only to Bektashis,[73] influenced, in some way, Vokopola's thought, as he was an active Sufi initiate, whose beliefs could have been able to apparently shape his conception of man. However, his religious and spiritual affiliation does not fully explain the aims that involved him in dealing with esoteric comparativism, although it played an important role.

Political Claims

To understand Vokopola's intellectual aims, it is important to consider his biography in full. He was one of the most eminent fathers of the Albanian nation. Using his knowledge, charismatic leadership, and political vision, he contributed to creating the institutional and legislative bases of the Albanian state: he was a part of many governments and managed several institutions. Vokopola was a Muslim and also leader of Islamic organizations, but, like many other fathers of the nation, he always asserted that Albanian nationhood should encompass and embed other religious and cultural identities. This ideology, called "Albanism," was born in the late Ottoman period to legitimate the formation of the Albanian nation, which needed an inclusive and universal nationalistic project to unify the heterogeneous Albanian mosaic of cultures, religions and languages. At the time of his birth, Albania was a pluriconfessional country (70 percent Muslims, the rest Orthodox and Catholics) with several social and cultural differences: the Albanian language was composed of many dialects, divided into two major groups: *Gegë* (mostly Catholics and Sunni Muslims) in the north and *Toskë* (mostly Orthodox and Bektashis) in the south. The social and linguistic divisions[74] between the north (*Gegë*) and the south (*Toskë*), the cultural disparities among religious groups,[75] the absence of an ancient culture and the massive scale of illiteracy slowed the development of a national consciousness (Albanism) which needed the (re)invention of the

literary culture and the standardization of the language that was carried out in 1908 in Bitola/Manastirit.[76]

In the interwar period, King Zog (reigned 1928–1939)[77] prompted the institutionalization of religious communities to frame religious authority and legitimation. The Bektashis, after participating in the nationalist project, became an autonomous religious denomination in 1935, separated from Christians and Muslims as a third religious way.[78] Muslim authorities decided to create the Drita Hyjnore association to organize Sufi activities and restrain the charisma of shaykhs who were promoting fervent internal debate[79] and providing spiritual and healing support to the faithful.[80] Vokopola, as its secretary, had to manage the cultural and public activities of the association in order to prepare a common political discourse that was able to sponsor the national spirit. In this way, Drita Hyjnore embedded all *ṭuruq*, as the Sufi main actor inside the public political arena.

For that reason, in 1939, the association began to publish the magazine *Njeriu* in order to suggest new intellectual solutions that could encompass spiritual, cultural and political claims to legitimate national unity among the faithful. Vokopola, who strongly animated the intellectual debate within Drita Hyjnore, wrote some articles that dealt directly with patriotic themes: one paper, published in 1943, treated the "Hymn I ri i Flamurit" (New Hymn of the Flag), and another, "Ate, unë njoha!…" (This, I knew…), evoked the anniversary of the nation's birth. This nationalistic spirit animated Vokopola to outline his metaphysical explanation about mysteries, human beings and the world, as he intended to propose an all-encompassing view of mysticism which included Sufism, Hermetism, Judaism, Hinduism and other metaphysical traditions. In this sense, Vokopola wanted to support religious universalism in order to legitimate the multi-denominational system of the young Albanian nation; he aimed to assert a single "occult matrix" behind all metaphysical traditions. In this way, he aimed to merge mystical doctrines and national ideology to advance his personal hypothesis, fully explained in his articles.

Conclusions

Vokopola outlined a comparative work that used different sources and had the ultimate aim of demonstrating the existence of hidden doctrines (the mysteries) that apparently only the elect could grasp. In many ways, he shared the Traditionalist ideas proposed by Guénon, such as a typically elitist and anti-modern approach; he also supported esoteric theories

(from Schuré) about the hidden nature of human doctrines. From the other side, despite being a Sufi scholar and *murīd*, he combined Islamic doctrines with other esoteric traditions using several sources according to a syncretic perspective. For example, the analogy of man as a microcosm-macrocosm emphasizes the influence of some anthropomorphic and incarnationist doctrines that were embedded into Albanian Sufism, as Vokopola and other authors claimed.

Vokopola used these doctrines to outline his speculations about "hidden knowledge" and "human universalism" being part of the Albanian national spirit. He proposed an inclusive concept of human beings, so he never expressed any racist theory, unlike other contemporary thinkers who supported or stated supremacist values, such as Evola, who proposed his thesis about races and spirits. Otherwise, he proposed a revival of human values—precisely at the time when people were crushed by the horrors of war. Vokopola's speculations seem to be highly oriented by his personal claims to have discovered the hidden knowledge behind the material and sensible world, to have caught the common existential locus or doctrines that oriented human existence.

Notes

1. This chapter is based on the entire bibliographic production of Vokopola, but focuses mainly on his works in *Njeriu*.
2. According to Nathalie Clayer, three factors motivated this formative process: the presence of different religious confessions in the country (Catholics, Orthodox, Muslims); the diffusion of positivist ideas among the patriots; and finally, the independence of the Bektashiyya as an independent religious community. In this way, at least formally, the state rationalized the relationship between the different religious communities according to a secular institutional framework: this approach was adopted from the birth of the Albanian nation, when the High Council of Regence was composed of Catholics, Orthodox, Sunni Muslims and Bektashis. See Natahlie Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais* (Paris: Karthala Editions, 2018), 703–708; Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, *Nazione e religione in Albania* (*1920–1944*) (Lecce: Besa, 2002); Shih Ali M. Basha, *Islam në Shqipëri gjatë shekujve* (Tirana, 2013), 119–139; Alexandre Popovic, *L'islam balkanique* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1986).
3. This chapter shares the idea of the Mediterranean developed by Fernand Braudel as a cultural and social area characterized by the continuous interaction of networks and actors that do not necessarily overlook the sea.

Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, vol. 3, *Les événements, la politique et les hommes* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2017).

4. For a definition of syncretism see André Droogers, "The Problem of Definition, the Definition of the Problem," in *Dialogue and Syncretism: An interdisciplinary Approach*, ed. Jerald Gort, Hendrik Vroom, Rein Fernhout, and Anton Wessels (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1989), vol. 1, 7; Peter van der Veer, "Syncretism, Multiculturalism and the Discourse of Tolerance," in *Syncretism/anti-syncretism: The politics of Religious Synthesis*, ed. Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw (London: Routledge, 1994), 196–211; Anita Maria Leopold and Jeppe Sinding Jensen (eds), *Syncretism in Religion: A Reader* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).
5. Mexhid Yvejsi, "Ferid Mustafa Vokopola 1887–1969," *Zemra Shqiptare* September 2009, accessed June 16, 2020, http://www.zemrashqiptare.net/news/10301/mexhid-yvejsi-ferid-vokopola.html; Eugen Shehu, "Ferid Vokopola: shqipëria asht e jona, e shqiptarëve," *Lajmi Shqip* November 2012, accessed June 16, 2020. http://www.lajmishqip.com/?p=21829.
6. The Congress of Lushnjë (Kongresi i Lushnjës) was a conference of Albanian political leaders held from January 28 to January 31, 1920, in Lushnjë, Albania, to deal with the issues arising from the military control of the country by mainly Italian and secondarily French troops and its political leadership by the pro-Italian Durrës-based government.
7. "Vokopola Ferid," in *Enciklopedi. 100 Personalitete Shqiptare të Kulturës Islame* (Tirana: Komuiteti Mysliman i Shqipërisë—Botimi i dytë, 2013).
8. Shehu, "Ferid Vokopola."
9. Nathalie Clayer, *L'Albanie, pays des derviches. Les ordres mystiques musulmans en Albanie à l'époque post-ottomane (1912–1967)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1990), 24–35.
10. *Zani i Naltë* was a religious magazine that was published from October 1923 to April 1939 by the Albanian Muslim Community in Tirana. In this magazine, Vokopola wrote philosophical essays "Problemi i Zotit dhe Djallit" (The Problem of God and the Devil), "Verdikti i fatit" (The Verdict of Chance) and "Morali dhe epshi i masave" (The Morality and Lust of the Masses).
11. *Kultura islame* was the religious magazine published by the Islamic Community of Albania from 1939 to 1943. In this magazine, the most prominent of its time, he also published essays in the field of art history, such as "Kuptimi i artit dhe kufijtë e tij" (Art and Its Limits) and "Shkrimtarët e Letërsisë Islamike në Shqipëri" (The Writers of Islamic Literature in Albania).

12. In Albania, *Sultan Nevruz* is the annual festival, held on 22nd March, that commemorates the birthday of ʻAlī ibn Abī Ṭ ālib and, at the same time, the advent of spring. See Gianfranco Bria, "Celebrating Sultan Nevruz: Between Theological Debate and Multi-Framed Practice in Contemporary Albania," *Studia Islamica* 114, no. 3 (2020): 355–377.
13. See Alban Dobruna, "Trajtimi i Tesawufit nga Ferit Vokopola në revistën NJERIU," paper presented at the International Conference "Shkencat humane studime kërkimore në spiritualizimin e shkencave humane," May 11, 2012. Tirana: Universitetin "Beder."
14. See Ferit Vokopola, "Randësi e Pikës në Mysticism e Atomsim," *Njeriu* 7, Viti I (1943): 7–15; Ferit Vokopola, "Ku shkon njerzimi," *Njeriu* 9, Viti I (1943): 1–5; Ferit Vokopola, "Përse përpiqen dy shpirtra," *Njeriu* 12, Viti I (1942): 1–6; Ferit Vokopola, "Vuajtjet e jetës dhe zëri i shpëtimit," *Njeriu* 14, Viti I (1943): 1–5; Ferit Vokopola, "Qëllimi i njishëm i Feve," *Njeriu* 18, Viti II (1943): 3–8.
15. Vokopola, "Randësi e Pikës në Mysticism e Atomsim," 7–15.
16. Vokopola, "Ku shkon njerzimi," 1–5.
17. Vokopola, "Përse përpiqen dy shpirtra," 1–6.
18. Vokopola, "Vuajtjet e jetës dhe zëri i shpëtimit," 1–5.
19. Vokopola, "Vuajtjet e jetës dhe zëri i shpëtimit," 4.
20. Vokopola, "Qëllimi i njishëm i Feve," 6.
21. "Thesari Pshehtë" (The Secret of Treasury), "Besimi i Halukut" (Haluk's Faith), "Të falemi Naim!" (Forgive Naim!), "Mysteri i Qarkësisë" (Mystery of the Circumcision), "Mbarështrimi i Gjthësisë, Drita në pasqyrë" (Light in the Mirror), "Sbëhet kurrgjë pa para!" (There is nothing without money!), "Aeroplani i luftës" (Airplane of War), "Pika përmbledhëse" (Summing up).
22. Ferit Vokopola, "Në prakun e Mystereve," *Njeriu* 3–4, Viti I (1942): 1–12.
23. Vokopola, "Në prakun e Mystereve," 1.
24. In this part, Vokopola cites the studies of Gaston Maspéro (Gaston-Camille-Charles Maspéro, 1846–1916), a French Egyptologist and director general of excavations and antiquities for the Egyptian government, who was responsible for locating a collective royal tomb of prime historic importance.
25. Vokopola, "Në prakun e Mystereve," 2.
26. Vokopola, "Në prakun e Mystereve," 3.
27. Vokopola, "Në prakun e Mystereve," 3.
28. Hermes, guided by Osiris, saw a marvelous world of seven heavens resting on seven luminous spheres. In each of these spheres he represented the reason of the Luminous Word, each of which commands a sphere of the Spirit to which a planet corresponds: the Moon was the spirit; Mercury held science; Venus holds the mirror of Love; the Sun raised the flame of

eternal Beauty; March brandished the club of Justice; Jupiter possessed divine Intelligence; on the edge of the world, under the zodiacal signs, Saturn carries universal wisdom. These spheres attached to the seven planets symbolize seven different states of matter and the world; seven different worlds that each man and each humanity must cross in their evolution through the solar system. These seven divine cosmogonies of Hermes in Hinduism correspond to the Seven Devas, in Persia to the seven Ameshapands, to the seven Angels of the Chaldeans, the seven (*sic*!) Sefirot of Kabbalah, the seven Archangels of the Christian Apocalypse. These great septenaries also manifest themselves in the constitution of man who is sixfold in his evolution, cf. Vokopola, "Në prakun e Mystereve," 2.

29. Vokopola, "Në prakun e Mystereve," 2.
30. Vokopola, "Në prakun e Mystereve," 3.
31. Vokopola reported: "The Prophet Idris was a Master of Mathematics who received from God the knowledge of astrology, science and arithmetic. He (Idris) was born in Egypt, called Heresyl-Heramise, in Hellenic language he was called Ermis, then Merkuri, later Hermes; but his real name is Henon."
32. Cf. Nuri Çevikel, "Taşköprîzâde (İsâmeddîn) Ahmed Bin Mustafa'nın Mevzû'Âtü'l-'Ulûm'unda İlim Kavramı 1495–1561," *Gazi Akademik Bakış* 3.6 (2010); Süleyman Çaldak, "Taşköprülüzâde'nin Mevzû'âtu'lulûm'undaki İlimler Tasnîfi Üzerine," *F.Ü.Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 15, no. 2 (2005): 117–146.
33. Vokopola, "Në prakun e Mystereve," 5.
34. Vokopola, "Në prakun e Mystereve," 5.
35. Vokopola, "Në prakun e Mystereve," 6.
36. The microcosmic idea—a term which will be used synonymously with microcosmism and the microcosm-macrocosm analogy—refers to cases where similarities or corresponding features occurring at the level of a bigger entity (i.e. a macrocosm) are found to be reflected in an entity of smaller scale (i.e. a microcosm). Or, as Conger quoted, "Man is a microcosm, or 'little world,' in one way or another epitomizing a macrocosm, or 'great world'—i.e. the universe or some part thereof." Cf. George Perrigo, Conger, *Theories of Macrocosms and Microcosms in the History of Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1922).
37. According to various scholars, this analogy is present in different religious, spiritual, philosophical and metaphysical traditions without an apparent historical or genealogical link, so it is a "perennial issue." According to Tymieniecka, this phenomenology indicates: the human interrogative logos is born that channels the human being to question itself on its existence. A question that pushes man to question the forces that he considers ungovernable and mysterious to find a means to sensitive knowledge, while

not losing the constant reference to their existence. See Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, Introduction, in *Islamic Philosophy and Occidental Phenomenology on the Perennial Issue of Microcosm and Macrocosm*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 8.

38. According to Faivre, "Western esoterism concerns correspondences between a higher divine reality, the universe, the earthly realm, and human beings; the idea of a living, ensouled, or animated universe; notions of spiritual intermediaries in the form of hierarchies, planes, and angels acting as a ladder of descent and ascent between the higher and lower worlds; and the idea of the human soul's transmutation through reawakening and returning to these higher worlds." Cf. Antoine Faivre, "Ancient and Medieval Sources of Modern Esoteric Movements," in *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*, ed. Antoine Faivre and Jacob Needleman (London: SCM Press, 1993), 3–12.
39. Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 21.
40. René Guénon, *La crise du monde moderne* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2017).
41. Julius Evola, *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno* (Rome: Edizioni mediterranee, 1998).
42. René Guénon, *Man and his becoming according to the Vedanta* (Bloomington: Sophia Perennis, 2004).
43. Henry Steel Olcott, *Theosophy: Religion, and Occult Science* (London: Redway, 1885).
44. Clement Salaman, "Echoes of Egypt in Hermes and Ficino" in *Marsilio Ficino. His Theology, his Philosophy, his Legacy*, ed. Michael Allen and Valery Rees (Leiden: Brill, 2002): 115–135.
45. Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 60–63.
46. Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, 64–66.
47. For Steiner, the world is the manifestation of the spirit that is epitomized into several centers that after millennia of evolution revert to the unification of the pure spirit. See Rudolf Steiner, *Theosophy: An Introduction to the Supersensible Knowledge of the World and the Destination of Man* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 2011), 96–97.
48. Steiner, *Theosophy*, 63–68.
49. For Hammer, "the *scientist*, takes the line that scientific inquiry—provided it is interpreted correctly—serves to prove the validity of the religious point of view." Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, 203.
50. Rudolf Steiner, *Macrocosm and Microcosm* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1986).
51. Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, 225–231.

52. Schuré was a French occultist who was strongly influenced by the hermeticism of the Masonic circles that he habitually frequented. Several friendships and frequentations particularly influenced Schuré's thinking. The first was Wagner, who Schuré contacted after being impressed by Wagner's dramatic opera "Tristan und Isolde." During his visit to Italy, Schuré met Marguerita Albana Mignaty, who he posthumously considered his muse. In 1906, he met Rudolf Steiner, with whom he shared several beliefs and interests. See Alphonse Roux and Robert Veyssié, *Édouard Schuré: son œuvre et sa pensée, étude précédée de la "Confession philosophique" d'Éd. Schuré* (Paris: Perrin, 1913).
53. Jean Dornis, *Un celte d'Alsace. La vie, la pensée et les plus belles pages d'Édouard Schuré* (Paris: NP, 1923).
54. Dornis, *Un celte d'Alsace.*
55. "Silsila," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition (Leiden: Brill). Consulted online on 16 June 2020 https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7032.
56. The *khirqa* is the initiatory cloak of the Sufi chain of spirituality, with which esoteric knowledge and *baraka* are passed from the *Murshid* or the Shaykh to the aspirant *murīd*. The *khirqa* initiates an aspirant into the *silsila*, the chain or lineage of Shaykhs that goes back to the Prophet, Muhammad. This chain serves as the channel through which *baraka* flows from the source of spiritual revelation to the being of the initiate. See Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 102–103.
57. About this topic see: Rudolf Allers, "Microcosmus from Anaximandros to Paracelsus." *Traditio, Studies in Ancient and Medieval History, Thought, and Religion* II (1944): 319–408; Leonard Barkan, *Nature's Work of Art: The Human Body as Image of the World* (London: Yale University Press, 1975); Inka Nokso-Koivisto, "Summarized Beauty: The Microcosm-Macrcosm analogy and Islamic aesthetics," *Studia Orientalia Electronica* 111 (2011): 251–269.
58. For Ibn al-'Arabi (1165–1240), the Man brings together the lower and upper realities and he is the intermediary between the *haqq* and the *khlaq*, God and Creation. Cfr. Michel Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints: prophétie et sainteté dans la doctrine d'Ibn Arabî*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 78–79. Al-Jili (1365–1424) speaks about the unique divine creative Act (Q. 36:11) which is contained in a single prototype that reflects all divine and terrestrial qualities (*niṣāb*). Titus Burckhardt, *L'uomo universal* (Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1981), 10–11.
59. Hamid Algar, "The Hurufi influence on Bektashism" in *Bektachiyya. Etudes sur l'ordre mystique des Bektachis et les groupes relevant de Hadji*

Bektach, ed. Alexandre Popovic and Gilles Veinstein (Istanbul: ISIS, 1995), 35–53.

60. Cf. Haji Bektash Veli, *Makalat*, 107–108.
61. Hazret-i Virani Baba, *Nazım ve nesr-i Hazret-i Virani Baba*, 90.
62. About this topic, see Mürüvet Harman, "İnsan-I Kâmil Yazi Resimlerinin İkonogrfik Ve Sembolik Anlamlarina Dair Bir Çözümleme," *Turkish Culture & Haci Bektas Veli Research Quarterly* 70 (2014): 97–119.
63. Virani Baba, *Nazım ve nesr-i Hazret-i Virani Baba*, 83–90.
64. Ḳayġusuz Abdāl (fl. second half of the fourteenth century–first half of the fifteenth century) was a Turkish mystic poet and writer belonging to the dervish group named Abdālān-ı Rūm, who was the first major representative and the most influential forerunner of the genre which later came to be known as Alevi-Bektashi literature.
65. Zeynep Oktay Uslu, *L'Homme Parfait dans le Bektachisme et l'Alévisme: Le Kitāb-ı Maġlaṭa de Ḳayġusuz Abdāl*, (PhD diss., EPHE, 2017), 322–324.
66. *Ḥurūfīsm*, a sect founded in Iran in the late fourteenth century by Fadallah Astarabadi (1339–1394), concerns the contemplation of God in the universe by means of letters as the instrument of contemplation of God, using the parallelism among human existence, God and the letters. According to Astarabadi's *magnum opus*, the *Jawidan-nama* (Book of Eternity), the human body and the universe are essentially identical—they are the manifestation of the complete divine Word. For Mir-Kasimov Orkhan, it is not appropriate to speak of a single *ḥurūfī* tradition, but of several *ḥurūfisms*, due to its ramification after the death of his founder. Cf. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, "Étude de textes ḥurūfi anciens: L'oeuvre fondatrice de Fadlallah Astarabadi," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 2, no. 2 (2009): 247–260.
67. ʿAli al-Aʿla (?–1419), one of the most influential *ḥurūfī* missionaries in Anatolia, *murīd* and son-in-law of Astarabadi, brought the *ḥurūfī* teachings to the Bektashi order. *Ḥurūfī* doctrines also passed into Naqshbandi, Qadiri, Rifaʿi, Saʿdi and other orders. Cf. Edward G Browne, "XXII. Further Notes on the Literature of the Hurufis and their Connection with the Bektashi order of Dervishes," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 39, no.3 (1907): 533–581; Algar, "The Hurufi influence on Bektashism;" Fatih Usluer and Yildiz Fırat, 'Hurufism Among Albanian Bektashis,' *Journal of International Social Research* 3, no. 15 (2010): 269–270; Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, *Hurufilik metinleri katalogu* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1973), 26–30.
68. This essay is conserved in the *Arkivi i Institutit të Historisë-Tiranë* (Archive of the Historic Institute in Tirana, Albania).
69. We have no further information about him.

70. Man would be subdivided into 32 parts whose planets, zodiacal signs and stars correspond to a single human bodily part, and each of those correspond to a letter of the Arabic alphabet. See Ferid Vokopola, *Mendime dhe studime historike, Hurufitë, Hurufitë shqiptar burimi dhe doktina e tyre*, 93.
71. See Algar, "The Hurufi influence on Bektashism," 51–53.
72. See Algar, "The Hurufi influence on Bektashism," 52.
73. See for example the spread of the "Perfect Man" iconographies in many Albanian Sufi lodges. Cf. Fred De Jong, "The Iconography of Bektashism. A survey of themes and symbolism in clerical costume, liturgical objects and pictorial art," *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 4 (1989): 7–29; Gianfranco Bria and Gustavo Mayerà, "The Alide Iconography between Theological Debate and Popular Piety in Contemporary Albania," *Middle East-Topics & Arguments* 8 (2017): 57–72.
74. For example, among the *Gegë*, religious divisions were sharper and illiteracy was quite widespread; among the *Toskë*, the social structures were more nuanced, religious barriers were less rigid and illiteracy was lower. See Nathalie Clayer, "Le goût du fruit défendu ou de la lecture de l'albanais dans l'Empire ottoman finissant," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, 87–88 (September 1999): 225–250.
75. Each *millet* had a specific educational system, each of which advocated a particular literary culture (Muslim-Arabic, Persian and Turkish; Orthodox-Greek and Catholic-Italian or Latin) that shaped cultural disparities among Albanian populations.
76. According to Clayer, the diffusion of some positivist ideas among the élites and the presence of Bektashism caused the development of an "ecumenical and secular" nationalist discourse, which was independent of any other form of belonging, including the religious one. For further information see Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais.*
77. Ahmet Lekë Bej Zog (known as Zog I Scanderbeg III King of the Albanians) was an Albanian politician and soldier, Prime Minister of Albania (1922–1924), President of the Albanian Republic (1925–1928) and King of Albania (1928–1939).
78. See Nathalie Clayer, "Bektashisme et nationalisme albanais," in *Bektashiyya. Etudes sur l'ordre mystique des Bektachis et les groupes relevant de Hadji Bektach*, ed. Alexandre Popovic and Gilles Veinstein (Istanbul: ISIS, 1995), 277–308.
79. Within the Islamic communities, three intellectual currents took shape: on the one hand, the "Orientalists," called "the Elderly" (Të Vjetër), who stood in line of continuity with respect to Islam and its cultural background; then there were the "Occidentalists," also called "the Youth" (Të Rinjtë), who evoked the rejection of religion, especially Islam, as a barbaric

component and a relic of natural civil evolution; finally, there were the "Neo-Albanians" (Neoshqiptarët) who instead emphasized the Albanian culture and essence above any religious division. A strong ideological and religious impulse was given by the arrival of new brotherhoods in the country, in particular, by the Tijāniyya. Nathalie Clayer, "The Tijaniyya. Islamic Reformism and Islamic Revival in inter-war Albania," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 29, no. 4 (2009): 483–493.

80. The main role played by these Shaykhs was that of healers; other testimonies, moreover, emphasized the importance of the cult of the saints. Nathalie Clayer, "Saints and Sufis in Post-Communist Albania," in *Popular Movements and Democratization in the Islamic World*, ed. Kisaichi Masatoshi (London: Routledge, 2006), 33–42.

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